

*O. Henry Memorial Award*

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PRIZE STORIES  
OF 1921

CHOSEN BY THE  
SOCIETY OF ARTS  
AND SCIENCES

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CHOSEN BY THE SOCIETY OF  
ARTS AND SCIENCES

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY  
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## FOUNDER OF THE O. HENRY MEMORIAL COMMITTEE

THE plan for the creation of the O. Henry Memorial Committee was conceived and the work of the Committee inaugurated in the year 1918 by the late John F. Tucker, LL.M., then Directing Manager of the Society of Arts and Sciences. The Society promptly approved the plan and appropriated the sum necessary to inaugurate its work and to make the award.

The Committee is, therefore, in a sense, a memorial to Mr. Tucker, as well as to O. Henry. Up to the time of his death Mr. Tucker was a constant adviser of the Committee and an attendant at most of its meetings.

Born in New York City in 1871 and educated for the law, Mr. Tucker's inclinations quickly swept him into a much wider stream of intellectual development, literary, artistic, and sociological. He joined others in reviving the Twilight Club (now the Society of Arts and Sciences), for the broad discussion of public questions, and to the genius he developed for such a task the success of the Society up to the time of his death was chiefly due. The remarkable series of dinner discussions conducted under his management, for many years, in New York City, have helped to mould public opinion along liberal lines, to educate and inspire. Nothing he did gave him greater pride than the inception of the O. Henry Memorial Committee, and that his name should be associated with that work perpetually this tribute is hereby printed at the request of the Society of Arts and Sciences.

E. J. W.



## INTRODUCTION

IN 1918 the Society of Arts and Sciences established, through its Managing Director, John F. Tucker, the O. Henry Memorial. Since that year the nature of the annual prize and the work of the Committee awarding it have become familiar to writer, editor, and reader of short stories. To the best short story written by an American and published in America the sum of \$500 is awarded; to the second best, the sum of \$250. In 1919 the prize winning story was Margaret Prescott Montague's "England to America"; in 1920 it was Maxwell Struthers Burt's "Each in His Generation." Second winners were: 1919, Wilbur Daniel Steele's "For They Know Not What They Do," and, 1920, Frances Noyes Hart's "Contact!"<sup>1</sup>

In 1921 the Committee of Award consisted of these members:

BLANCHE COLTON WILLIAMS, Ph. D., Chairman  
EDWARD J. WHEELER, Litt. D.  
ETHEL WATTS MUMFORD  
FRANCES GILCHRIST WOOD  
GROVE E. WILSON

And the Committee of Administration:

JOHN F. TUCKER,<sup>2</sup> Founder of the O. Henry Memorial  
EDWARD J. WHEELER, Litt. D.  
GLENN FRANK, Editor of *The Century Magazine*  
GEORGE C. HOWARD, Attorney.

As in previous years each member of the Committee of Award held himself responsible for reviewing the brief fiction

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<sup>1</sup>The prizes were delivered on June 2, 1920, and on March 14, 1921, at the annual memorial dinner, Hotel Astor.

<sup>2</sup>Deceased, February 27, 1921. See page vii.

of certain magazines and for circulating such stories as warranted reading by other members.

Results in 1921 differ in a number of respects from those of 1919 and 1920. In the earlier half year, January excepted, every reader reported a low average of current fiction, so low as to excite apprehension lest the art of the short story was rapidly declining. The latter six months, however, marked a reaction, with a higher percentage of values in November and December. Explanation of the low level lies in the financial depression which forced a number of editors to buy fewer stories, to buy cheaply, or to search their vaults for remnant of purchases made in happier days. Improvement began with the return to better financial conditions.

The several members of the Committee have seldom agreed on the comparative excellence of stories, few being of sufficient superiority in the opinion of the Committee as a whole to justify setting them aside for future consideration. The following three dozen candidates, more or less, average highest:

Addington, Sarah, Another Cactus Blooms (*Smart Set*, December).

Alexander, Elizabeth, Fifty-Two Weeks for Florette<sup>1</sup> (*Saturday Evening Post*, August 13).

Allen, Maryland, The Urge (*Everybody's*, September).

Arbuckle, Mary, Wasted (*Midland*, May).

Beer, Thomas, Mummery (*Saturday Evening Post*, July 30).

Burt, Maxwell Struthers, Buchanan Hears the Wind (*Harper's*, August).

Byrne, Donn, Reynardine (*McClure's*, May).

Chittenden, Gerald, The Victim of His Vision (*Scribner's*, May).

Comfort, Will Levington, and Dost, Zamin Ki, The Deadly Karait (*Asia*, August).

Cooper, Courtney Ryley, and Creagan, Leo F. Martin, Gerrity Gets Even (*American*, July).

Cooper, Courtney Ryley, Old Scarface (*Pictorial Review*, April).

Cram, Mildred, Stranger Things— (*Metropolitan*, January).

Derieux, Samuel A, Comet (*American*, December).

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<sup>1</sup>Reprinted as by Elizabeth Alexander Heermann.

- Hull, Helen R., Waiting (*Touchstone*, February).  
 Jackson, Charles Tenney, The Man who Cursed the Lilies (*Short Stories*, December 10).  
 Kerr, Sophie, Wild Earth (*Saturday Evening Post*, April 2).  
 Kniffin, Harry Anable, The Tribute (*Brief Stories*, September).  
 Lewis, O. F., The Get-Away (*Red Book*, February); The Day of Judgment (*Red Book*, October).  
 Mahoney, James, Wilfrid Reginald and the Dark Horse (*Century*, August).  
 Marshall, Edison, The Heart of Little Shikara (*Everybody's*, January).  
 Morris, Gouverneur, Groot's Macaw (*Cosmopolitan*, November); Just One Thing More (*Cosmopolitan*, December).  
 Mumford, Ethel Watts, "Aurore" (*Pictorial Review*, February); The Crowned Dead (*Short Stories*, July); Funeral Frank (*Detective Stories*, October 29).  
 Robbins, L. H., Mr. Downey Sits Down (*Everybody's*, June).  
 Steele, Wilbur Daniel, 'Toinette of Maissonnoir (*Pictorial Review*, July); The Marriage in Kairwan (*Harper's*, December).  
 Street, Julian, A Voice in the Hall (*Harper's*, September).  
 Stringer, Arthur, A Lion Must Eat (*McClure's*, March).  
 Tupper, Tristram, Grit (*Metropolitan*, March).  
 Vorse, Mary Heaton, The Halfway House (*Harper's*, October).  
 Wolff, William Almon, Thalassa! Thalassa! (*Everybody's*, July), j

The following stories rank high with a majority of the Committee:

- Anthony, Joseph, A Cask of Ale for Columban (*Century*, March).  
 Baker, Karle Wilson, The Porch Swing (*Century*, April).  
 Balmer, Edwin, "Settled Down" (*Everybody's*, February).  
 Beer, Thomas, Addio (*Saturday Evening Post*, October 29); The Lily Pond (*Saturday Evening Post*, April 16).  
 Biggs, John, Jr., Corkran of the Clamstretch (*Scribner's*, December).  
 Boulton, Agnes, The Snob (*Smart Set*, June).  
 Boyle, Jack, The Heart of the Lily (*Red Book*, February); The Little Lord of All the Earth (*Red Book*, March).

- Byrne, Donn, The Keeper of the Bridge (*McClure's*, April).  
Canfield, Dorothy, Pamela's Shawl (*Century*, August).  
Connell, Richard, The Man in the Cape (*Metropolitan*, July).  
Cooper, Courtney Ryley, The Fiend (*Cosmopolitan*, March);  
Love (*Red Book*, June).  
Cram, Mildred, Anna (*McCall's*, March); The Bridge  
(*Harper's Bazar*, April).  
Derieux, Samuel A., Figgers Can't Lie (*Delineator*, April);  
The Bolter (*American*, November).  
Dreiser, Theodore, Phantom Gold (*Live Stories*, March).  
Ellerbe, Alma and Paul, When the Ice Went Out (*Everybody's*,  
May).  
England, George Allan, Test Tubes (*Short Stories*, March).  
Erickson, Howard, The Debt (*Munsey's*, February).  
Fraenkel, H. E., The Yellow Quilt (*Liberator*, December).  
Ginger, Bonnie, The Decoy (*Century*, October).  
Hart, Frances Noyes, The American (*Pictorial Review*,  
November).  
Hergesheimer, Joseph, Juju (*Saturday Evening Post*, July 30);  
The Token (*Saturday Evening Post*, October 22).  
Hopper, Elsie Van de Water, The Flight of the Herons  
(*Scribner's*, November).  
Hughes, Rupert, When Crossroads Cross Again (*Collier's*,  
January 29).  
Hurst, Fannie, She Walks in Beauty (*Cosmopolitan*, August).  
Irwin, Inez Haynes, For Value Received (*Cosmopolitan*,  
November).  
Irwin, Wallace, The Old School (*Pictorial Review*, April).  
Kahler, Hugh MacNair, Like a Tree (*Saturday Evening Post*,  
January 22).  
Lanier, Henry Wysham, Circumstantial (*Collier's*, October  
15).  
Lewis, Sinclair, Number Seven (*American*, May).  
Mahoney, James, Taxis of Fate (*Century*, November).  
Mason, Grace Sartwell, Glory (*Harper's*, April).  
Moore, Frederick, The Picture (*Adventure*, September 10).  
Mouat, Helen, Aftermath (*Good Housekeeping*, September).  
Natteford, J. F., A Glimpse of the Heights (*Photoplay*,  
April).  
Neidig, William F., The Firebug (*Everybody's*, April).  
Pitt, Chart, Debt of the Snows (*Sunset*, April).

- Post, Melville Davisson, The Mottled Butterfly (*Red Book*, August); The Great Cipher (*Red Book*, November).  
Read, Marion Pugh, Everlasting Grace (*Atlantic Monthly*, March).  
Rhodes, Harrison, Night Life and Thomas Robinson (*Saturday Evening Post*, June 4).  
Rouse, William Merriam, Arms of Judgment (*Argosy-All-Story Weekly*, March 12).  
Shore, Viola Brothers, The Heritage (*Saturday Evening Post*, February 5).  
Singmaster, Elsie, The Magic Mirror (*Pictorial Review*, November).  
Springer, Fleta Campbell, The Mountain of Jehovah (*Harper's*, March).  
Tarkington, Booth, Jeannette (*Red Book*, May).  
Titus, Harold, The Courage of Number Two (*Metropolitan*, June).  
Train, Arthur, The Crooked Fairy (*McCall's*, July).  
Watson, Marion Elizabeth, Bottle Stoppers (*Pictorial Review*, June).  
Wormser, G. Ranger, Gossamer (*Pictorial Review*, March).

The following stories are regarded the best of the year by the judges whose names are respectively indicated:

1. The Marriage in Kairwan, by Wilbur Daniel Steele (*Harper's*, December).  
Ethel Watts Mumford.
2. A Life, by Wilbur Daniel Steele (*Pictorial Review*, August).  
Edward J. Wheeler.
3. Wisdom Buildeth Her House, by Donn Byrne (*Century*, December).  
Blanche Colton Williams.
4. Waiting, by Helen R. Hull (*Touchstone*, February).  
Grove E. Wilson.
5. The Poppies of Wu Fong, by Lee Foster Hartman (*Harper's*, November).  
Frances Gilchrist Wood.

Out of the first list sixteen stories were requested for republication in this volume. The significance of the third list lies in the fact that only one story was selected from it,

the others meeting objections from the remainder of the Committee.<sup>1</sup>

Since no first choice story won the prize, the Committee resorted, as in former years, to the point system, according to which the leader is "The Heart of Little Shikara," by Edison Marshall. To Mr. Marshall, therefore, goes the first prize of \$500. In like manner, the second prize, of \$250, is awarded to "The Man Who Cursed the Lilies," by Charles Tenney Jackson.

In discussing "A Life," "The Marriage in Kairwan," and "Toinette of Maissonnoir," all published by Wilbur Daniel Steele in 1921, in remarking upon the high merit of his brief fiction in other years, and in recalling that he alone is represented in the first three volumes of O. Henry Memorial Award Prize Stories, the Committee intimated the wish to express in some tangible fashion its appreciation of this author's services to American fiction. On the motion of Doctor Wheeler, therefore, the Committee voted to ask an appropriation from the Society of Arts and Sciences as a prize to be awarded on account of general excellence in the short story in 1919, 1920, and 1921. This sum of \$500 was granted by the Society, through the proper authorities, and is accordingly awarded to Wilbur Daniel Steele.

Two characteristics of stories published in 1921 reveal editorial policies that cannot but be harmful to the quality of this art. These ear-marks are complementary and, yet, paradoxically antipodal. In order to draw out the torso and tail of a story through Procrustean lengths of advertising pages, some editors place, or seem to place, a premium upon length. The writer, with an eye to acceptance by these editors, consciously or unconsciously pads his matter, giving a semblance of substance where substance is not. Many stories fall below first rank in the opinion of the Committee through failure to achieve by artistic economy the desired end. The comment "Overwritten" appeared again and again on the margins of such stories. The reverse of this policy, as practised by other editors, is that of chopping the tail or, worse, of cutting out sections from the body of the narrative, then roughly piecing together the parts to

<sup>1</sup> See pages xv, xvi, xviii, xx.



fit a smaller space determined by some expediency. Under the observation of the Committee have fallen a number of stories patently cut for space accommodation. Too free use of editorial blue pencil and scissors has furnished occasion for protest among authors and for comment by the press. For example, in *The Literary Review* of *The New York Post*, September 3, the leading article remarks, after granting it is a rare script that cannot be improved by good editing, and after making allowance for the physical law of limitation by space: "Surgery, however, must not become decapitation or such a trimming of long ears and projecting toes as savage tribes practise. It seems very probable that by ruthless reshaping and hampering specifications in our magazines, stories and articles have been seriously affected." Further, "the passion for editorial cutting" is graphically illustrated in *The Authors' League Bulletin* for December (page 8) by a mutilation of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address.

Although, by the terms of the Memorial, the Committee were at liberty to consider only stories by American authors, they could not but observe the increasing number of races represented through authorship. Some of the following names will be recognized from preceding years, some of them are new: Blasco Ibáñez, W. Somerset Maugham, May Sinclair, Mrs. Henry Dudeney, Mary Butts, Frank Swinnerton, Georges Clemenceau, Johan Bojer, H. Söderberg, Seumas Macmanus, R. Sabatini, Demetra Vaka, Achmed Abdullah, Rabindranath Tagore, A. Remizov, Konrad Bercovici, Anzia Yezierska, and—daughter of an English mother and Italian father who met in China, she herself having been born in San Francisco—Adriana Spadoni. Nor do these represent all the nations whose sons and daughters practise the one indigenous American art on its native soil. Let the list stand, without completion, sufficient to the point.

The note of democracy is sounded, as a sequence, in the subject matter. East Side Italian and Jew brush shoulders in Miss Spadoni's tales; Englishman, Dane, and South Sea Islander shake hands on the same page of W. Somerset Maugham's "The Trembling of a Leaf"; Norwegian, Frenchman, and Spaniard are among us, as before; Bercovici's gypsies from the Roumanian Danube, now collected in "Ghitza," flash colourful and foreign from the Dobrudja

Mountains and the Black Sea. In one remarkable piece of melodrama, "Rra Boloi," by the Englishman Crosbie Garstin (*Adventure*), and the African witch doctor of the Chwene Kopjes enters short-story literature.

The Oriental had been exploited to what appeared the ultimate; but continued interest in the Eastern problem brings tidal waves of Japanese and Chinese stories. Disarmament Conferences may or may not effect the ideal envisioned by the Victorian, a time "when the war drums throb no longer, and the battle-flags are furled in the Parliament of Man"; but the short story follows the gleam, merely by virtue of authorship and by reflecting the peoples of the earth.

When Lee Foster Hartman created his Chinese hero in "The Poppies of Wu Fong," dramatized Oriental inscrutability with Occidental suavity and sureness, and set off the Oriental gentleman in American surroundings, he brought together the nations in a new vision of the brotherhood of man. This story was preferred, for the reasons implied, by Frances Gilchrist Wood, who sees in Wu Fong's garden the subtle urge of acres of flowers, asleep under the stars, pitted against the greed of profiteers; who sees in answer to Western fume and fret the wisdom of Confucius, "Come out and see my poppies." The story was rejected by other members who, while applauding the author's motivation of character, his theme, and his general treatment, yet felt a lack of emotion and a faltering at the dramatic climax.

Wilbur Daniel Steele's "The Marriage in Kairwan" presents an appalling tragedy which, if it be typical, may befall any Tunisian lady who elects for herself man's standard of morality—for himself. Such a story is possible when the seeing eye and the understanding heart of an American grasps the situation in Kairwan and through the technician's art develops it, transforms it, and bears it into the fourth dimension of literature. The thread of narrative runs thinly, perhaps, through the stiffly embroidered fabric, heavy as cloth of gold; the end may be discerned too soon. But who can fail of being shocked at the actual dénouement? The story may be, as Ethel Watts Mumford admits, caviar. "But if so," she adds, "it is Beluga Imperial."

Donn Bryne's "Wisdom Buildeth Her House," is con-

structed on a historic foundation, the visit that Balkis, Queen of Sheba, made to Solomon, King of the Jews. Mr. Bryne has not only built a cunning mosaic, plunging into the stream of Scriptural narrative for his tessellations and drawing gems out of The Song of Solomon, but he has also recalled, by virtue of exercising a vigorous imagination, the glory of the royalty that was Sheba's and the grandeur of her domain in pictures as gorgeously splendid as those from an Arabian Night. He has elaborated the Talmud story with mighty conviction from a novel point of view and has whetted his theme on the story of a love the King lacked wisdom to accept. The Chairman of the Committee prefers this story; but other members assert that it lacks novelty and vitality, nor can they find that it adds anything new to the Song of Songs.

These three first choice stories, then, are strong in Oriental flavour, characters, and setting.

Again, democracy (in the etymological sense of the word, always, rather than the political) is exemplified in the fiction of 1921, in that the humblest life as well as the highest offers matter for romance. More than in former years, writers seek out the romance that lies in the lives of the average man or woman. Having learned that the Russian story of realism, with emphasis too frequently placed upon the naturalistic and the sordid, is not a vehicle easily adapted to conveying the American product, the American author of sincerity and belief in the possibility of realistic material has begun to treat it in romantic fashion, always the approved fashion of the short story in this country. So Harry Anable Kniffin's "The Tribute" weaves in 1,700 words a legend about the Unknown Soldier and makes emotionally vivid the burial of Tommy Atkins. Commonplace types regarded in the past as insufficiently drab, on the one hand, and insufficiently picturesque on the other are reflected in this new romantic treatment. Sarah Addington's "Another Cactus Blooms" prophesies colour in that hard and prickly plant the provincial teacher at Columbia for a term of graduate work. Humorously and sardonically the college professor is served up in "The Better Recipe," by George Boas (*Atlantic Monthly*, March); the doctorate degree method is satirized so bitterly, by Sinclair Lewis, in "The Post Mortem Murder" (*Century*,

May), as to challenge wonder, though so subtly as to escape all save the initiated.

Sophie Kerr's "Wild Earth" makes capital in like legitimate manner of the little shop girl and her farmer husband. Wesley Dean is as far removed from the Down Easterner of a Mary Wilkins farm as his wife, Anita, is remote from the Sallies and Nannies of the farmhouse. Of the soil this story bears the fragrance in a happier manner; its theme of wild passion belongs to the characters, as it might belong, also, to the man and woman of another setting. "Here is a romance of the farm," the author seems to say; not sordid realistic portrayal of earth grubbers. So, too, Tristram Tupper's "Grit" reveals the inspiration that flashed from the life of a junkman. So Cooper and Creagan evoke the drama of the railroad man's world: glare of headlight, crash of wreckage and voice of the born leader mingle in unwonted orchestration. "Martin Gerrity Gets Even" is reprinted as their best story of this *genre*.

The stories of Ethel Watts Mumford declare her cosmopolitan ability and her willingness to deal with lives widely diverse. At least three rank high in the estimation of her fellow-committeemen. "Aurore," by its terseness and poignant interpretation of the character of the woman under the Northern Lights touches poetry and is akin to music in its creative flight. The Committee voted to include it in Volume III, under the author's protest and under her express stipulation that it should not be regarded as a candidate for either prize. That another of her stories might have found place in the collection is indicated best by the following letter:

THE PLAYERS  
16 GRAMERCY PARK  
NEW YORK CITY

November 16th

RE. O. HENRY MEMORIAL PRIZE.

TO DR. B. C. WILLIAMS,  
605 West 113 Street,  
New York City.

MY DEAR DOCTOR WILLIAMS,

I mailed to you yesterday a copy of a story by Ethel Watts Mumford, entitled "Funeral Frank," published in the *Detective Story Magazine*

two weeks ago—for your consideration in awarding the O. Henry Memorial prize.

I think it is the best short story I have read in a long time both for originality of subject and technical construction.

The choice on the author's part of such an unsuspected (by the reader) and seemingly insignificant agent for the working of Nemesis, I think shows great skill. I say *seemingly* insignificant because a little dog seems such a small and unlikely thing to act the leading part in a criminal's judgment and suggested regeneration—and yet all lovers of animals know what such a tie of affection may mean, especially to one who has no human friends—and even while it works, the victim of Nemesis as the author says "is wholly unconscious of the irony of the situation."

Apart from this I think the tale is exceedingly well told in good English and with the greatest possible economy of space.

Yours very truly,

OLIVER HERFORD.

"Waiting," by Helen R. Hull, stands first on the list of Grove E. Wilson, who thinks its handling of everyday characters, its simplicity of theme and its high artistry most nearly fulfil, among the stories of the year, his ideal of short story requirements. Though admired as literature by the Committee, it seemed to one or two members to present a character study rather than a story. Certainly, in no other work of the period have relations between a given mother and daughter been psychologized with greater deftness and skill.

Other members of society reflected in the year are preachers, judges, criminals, actors, and actresses. For some years, it is true, actor and actress have been treated increasingly as human beings, less as puppets who walk about on the stage. This volume contains two stories illustrating the statement: "The Urge," by Maryland Allen, which marshalls the grimly ironic reasons for the success of the heroine who is the most famous comedienne of her day; "Fifty-Two Weeks for Florette," which touches with a pathos that gave the story instant recognition the lives of vaudeville Florette and her son. It is not without significance that these stories are the first their respective authors have published.

O. F. Lewis brings the judge to his own bar in "The Day of Judgment," but had difficulty in finding a dénouement commensurate with his antecedent material. The Committee preferred his "The Get-Away" and its criminals, who are presented objectively, without prejudice, save as their own

## INTRODUCTION

acts invoke it. Viciously criminal is Tedge, of "The Man Who Cursed the Lilies," by Charles Tenney Jackson. The Committee value this narrative for the power and intensity of its subject matter, for its novel theme, for its familiar yet seldom-used setting, for its poetic justice and for its fulfilment of short story structural laws.

"The Victim of His Vision," by Gerald Chittenden, dramatizes the missionary's reverse, unusual in fiction, and presents a convincing demonstration of the powers of voodoo. Readers who care for manifestations of the superstitious and the magical will appreciate the reality of this story as they will that of "Rra Boloï," mentioned above. They may also be interested in comparing these with Joseph Hergesheimer's "Juju." Mr. Hergesheimer's story, however, fails to maintain in the outcome the high level of the initial concept and the execution of the earlier stages.

A number of 1921 stories centre about a historic character. F. Scott Fitzgerald's "Tarquin of Cheapside" (*Smart Set*, February) offers in episode form the motivation of Shakespeare's "Rape of Lucrece"; Mary Raymond Shipman Andrews parallels her "The Perfect Tribute" and eulogy of Lincoln with "His Soul Goes Marching On" and warm reminiscence of Roosevelt; Fleta Campbell Springer's "The Rôle of Madame Ravelles" is apparently a tapestry interweaving the stately figure of Georgette LeBlanc. Ranking highest among these personal narratives, however, is Mildred Cram's "Stranger Things—" Besides calling up, under the name of Cecil Grimshaw, the irresistible figure of Oscar Wilde, the author has created a supernatural tale of challenging intricacy and imaginative genius. The only other stories of the supernatural to find place in the Committee's first list are Maxwell Struthers Burt's "Buchanan Hears the Wind" and Mary Heaton Vorse's "The Halfway House." In all of these, suggestion, delicately managed, is the potent element of success.

Animals figure in vaster numbers and under intensive psychological study. That a race-horse owner goes nowadays to the astrologer for a horoscope of his racer is a fact that insinuatingly elevates the beast to the plane of his master. In the short story of 1921, the monkey, the tiger, the elephant, the dog and all their kind are treated from an anthropo-

morphic point of view. Courtney Ryley Cooper's titles—"Love" and "Vengeance," for example—covering stories dominated by the animal character, betray the author's ascription of human attributes to his hero or villain. "Reynardine," by Donn Byrne, retails with haunting charm the friendship between the Fitzpauls and the fox, in an instance that tests the friendship. Foxes, for Morgan of the story, "took on for him now a strange, sinister entity. . . . They had become to him a quasi-human, hypernormal race. . . . They had tabus as strict as a Maori's. Strange, mystical laws."—"Corkran of the Clamstretch" uniquely portrays the ugly and heroic "R. T. C." throughout as a gentleman, "who met triumph with boredom," and "defeat, as a great gentleman should, with quiet courtesy and good humour." Samuel A. Derieux adds "Comet" to his list of superintelligent dogs in a story the Committee regard as one of his best. It should be compared with R. G. Kirk's "Gun-Shy" (*Saturday Evening Post*, October 22). Similar in theme, in sympathy and in the struggle—that of a trainer to overcome a noble dog's fear of the powder roar—the stories diverge in the matter of workmanship. Yet "Gun-Shy" is based on a plot superior to that of "Comet." Oddly enough, the Committee preferred not one of the humanized-beast stories, but Edison Marshall's "The Heart of Little Shikara." The preference was because of a number of counts, however; moreover, the man eater takes second place beside Little Shikara, whose bravery and loyalty motivate the thrilling climax of the narrative. And it is just this: a superb story, with underscoring for "story."

Anthropomorphism is found at its height in "A Life," by Wilbur Daniel Steele. Dr. Edward J. Wheeler places this story first of the year's brief fiction, on the score of originality, power, and satisfactory evolution of the struggle, with its triumphant dramatic reverse. Other members of the Committee, though sensible of its claim to high distinction, believe it is a novelette, not to be classed as a short story, and therefore barred from consideration. Its spirit, one affirms, lacks something of the vigour which made of "Guiablesse" (*Harper's*, 1919) so convincing a work of art. Another member finds its value somewhat decreased in that

its theme had been used similarly in John Masefield's "The Wanderer."

The child's place in the democracy of the short story was assured years ago. No remarkably outstanding examples have come from the pen of Booth Tarkington, amusing as are his adolescents and children of the *Red Book* tales. The best combinations of humour and childhood appeared to the Committee to be "Wilfrid Reginald and the Dark Horse," by James Mahoney, and "Mr. Downey Sits Down," by L. H. Robbins. For laughter the reader is recommended to each of these, the latter of which is reprinted in this volume. For humour plus a trifle more of excitement, "Mummery," by Thomas Beer, is included. Mr. Beer has succeeded in handling Mrs. Egg as Miss Addington manages Miss Titwiler, the "Cactus"; that is, as the equal of author and reader, but also—and still without condescension—as reason for twinkles and smiles.

Apart from consideration of impulses dominating the short story of 1921, impulses here summarized under the general idea of democracy, the story is different in several particulars. First, its method of referring to drink, strong drink, marks it of the present year. The setting is frequently that of a foreign country, where prohibition is not yet known; the date of the action may be prior to 1919; or the apology for presence of intoxicating liquors is forthcoming in such statement as "My cellar is not yet exhausted, you see."

Second, the war is no longer tabu; witness "The Tribute," and "His Soul Goes Marching On." Touched by the patina of time and mellowed through the melliflence of age, the war now makes an appeal dissimilar to that which caused readers two or three years ago to declare they were "fed up."

Third, Freudian theories have found organic place in the substance of the story. They have not yet found incorporation in many narratives that preserve short story structure, however—although it is within conceivability that the influence may finally burst the mould and create a new—and the Committee agree in demanding both substance and structure as short story essentials.

Finally, the story reflects the changing ideals of a constantly changing age. Not only are these ideals changing because of cross-currents that have their many sources in



racial springs far asunder, not only because of contact or conflict between the ideals and cosmic forces dimly apprehended; also they are changing because of the undeniable influence of what Emerson called the Oversoul. The youth of the time is different, as youth is always different. But now and then a sharp cleavage separates the succeeding generations, and it separates them now. The youth of England has found interpretation in Clemence Dane's play, "A Bill of Divorcement." In America, the interpretation is only half articulate; but when the incoherent sounds are wholly intelligible, the literature of the short story will have entered, in definite respects, upon a new era.

The Committee of Award wish once again to thank the authors, editors, and publishers whose coöperation makes possible this annual volume and the O. Henry Memorial Prizes.

BLANCHE COLTON WILLIAMS.

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*O. HENRY MEMORIAL  
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PRIZE STORIES  
of 1921*



# THE HEART OF LITTLE SHIKARA

By EDISON MARSHALL

From *Everybody's*

IF IT hadn't been for a purple moon that came peering up above the dark jungle just at nightfall, it would have been impossible to tell that Little Shikara was at his watch. He was really just the colour of the shadows—a rather pleasant brown—he was very little indeed, and besides, he was standing very, very still. If he was trembling at all, from anticipation and excitement, it was no more than Nahar the tiger trembles as he crouches in ambush. But the moon did show him—peering down through the leaf-clusters of the heavy vines—and shone very softly in his wide-open dark eyes.

And it was a purple moon—no other colour that man could name. It looked almost unreal, like a paper moon painted very badly by a clumsy stage-hand. The jungle-moon quite often has that peculiar purplish tint, most travellers know, but few of them indeed ever try to tell what causes it. This particular moon probed down here and there between the tall bamboos, transformed the jungle—just now waking—into a mystery and a fairyland, glinted on a hard-packed elephant trail that wound away into the thickets, and always came back to shine on the coal-black Oriental eyes of the little boy beside the village gate. It showed him standing very straight and just as tall as his small stature would permit, and looked oddly silvery and strange on his long, dark hair. Little Shikara, son of Khoda Dunnoo, was waiting for the return of a certain idol and demigod who was even now riding home in his *howdah* from the tiger hunt.

Other of the villagers would be down to meet Warwick

Sahib as soon as they heard the shouts of his beaters—but Little Shikara had been waiting almost an hour. Likely, if they had known about it, they would have commented on his badness, because he was notoriously bad, if indeed—as the villagers told each other—he was not actually cursed with evil spirits.

In the first place, he was almost valueless as a herder of buffalo. Three times, when he had been sent with the other boys to watch the herds in their wallows, he had left his post and crept away into the fringe of jungle on what was unquestionably some mission of witchcraft. For small naked brown boys, as a rule, do not go alone and unarmed into the thick bamboos. Too many things can happen to prevent them ever coming out again; too many brown silent ribbons crawl in the grass, or too many yellow, striped creatures, no less lithe, lurk in the thickets. But the strangest thing of all—and the surest sign of witchcraft—was that he had always come safely out again, yet with never any satisfactory explanations as to why he had gone. He had always looked some way very joyful and tremulous—and perhaps even pale if from the nature of things a brown boy ever can look pale. But it was the kind of paleness that one has after a particularly exquisite experience. It was not the dumb, teeth-chattering paleness of fear.

"I saw the sergeant of the jungle," Little Shikara said after one of these excursions. And this made no sense at all.

"There are none of the King's soldiers here," the brown village folk replied to him. "Either thou liest to us, or thine eyes lied to thee. And didst thou also see the chevron that told his rank?"

"That was the way I knew him. It was the black bear, and he wore the pale chevron low on his throat."

This was Little Shikara all over. Of course he referred to the black Himalayan bear which all men know wears a yellowish patch, of chevron shape, just in front of his fore legs; but why he should call him a jungle-sergeant was quite beyond the wit of the village folk to say. Their imagination did not run in that direction. It never even occurred to them that Little Shikara might be a born jungle creature, expropriated by the accident of birth—one of that free, strange breed that can never find peace in the villages of men.

"But remember the name we gave him," his mother would say. "Perhaps he is only living up to his name."

For there are certain native hunters in India that are known, far and wide, as the Shikaris; and possibly she meant in her tolerance that her little son was merely a born huntsman. But in reality Little Shikara was not named for these men at all. Rather it was for a certain fleet-winged little hawk, a hunter of sparrows, that is one of the most free spirits in all the jungle.

And it was almost like taking part in some great hunt himself—to be waiting at the gate for the return of Warwick Sahib. Even now, the elephant came striding out of the shadows; and Little Shikara could see the trophy. The hunt had indeed been successful, and the boy's glowing eyes beheld—even in the shadows—the largest, most beautiful tiger-skin he had ever seen. It was the great Nahar, the royal tiger, who had killed one hundred cattle from near-by fields.

Warwick Sahib rode in his *howdah*, and he did not seem to see the village people that came out to meet him. In truth, he seemed half asleep, his muscles limp, his gray eyes full of thoughts. He made no answer to the triumphant shouts of the village folk. Little Shikara glanced once at the lean, bronzed face, the limp, white, thin hands, and something like a shiver of ecstasy went clear to his ten toes. For like many other small boys, all over the broad world, he was a hero-worshipper to the last hair of his head; and this quiet man on the elephant was to him beyond all measure the most wonderful living creature on the earth.

He didn't cry out, as the others did. He simply stood in mute worship, his little body tingling with glory. Warwick Sahib had looked up now, and his slow eyes were sweeping the line of brown faces. But still he did not seem to see them. And then—wonder of wonders—his eyes rested full on the eyes of his little worshipper beside the gate.

But it was quite the way of Warwick Sahib to sweep his gray, tired-out eyes over a scene and seemingly perceive nothing; yet in reality absorbing every detail with the accuracy of a photographic plate. And his seeming indifference was not a pose with him, either. He was just a great sportsman who was also an English gentleman, and he had learned certain lessons of impassiveness from the wild. Only one of

the brown faces he beheld was worth a lingering glance. And when he met that one his eyes halted in their sweeping survey—and Warwick Sahib smiled.

That face was the brown, eager visage of Little Shikara. And the blood of the boy flowed to the skin, and he glowed red all over through the brown.

It was only the faintest of quiet, tolerant smiles; but it meant more to him than almost any kind of an honour could have meant to the prematurely gray man in the *howdah*. The latter passed on to his estate, and some of the villagers went back to their women and their thatch huts. But still Little Shikara stood motionless—and it wasn't until the thought suddenly came to him that possibly the beaters had already gathered and were telling the story of the kill that with startling suddenness he raced back through the gates to the village.

Yes, the beaters had assembled in a circle under a tree, and most of the villagers had gathered to hear the story. He slipped in among them, and listened with both outstanding little ears. Warwick Sahib had dismounted from his elephant as usual, the beaters said, and with but one attendant had advanced up the bed of a dry creek. This was quite like Warwick Sahib, and Little Shikara felt himself tingling again. Other hunters, particularly many of the rich sahibs from across the sea, shot their tigers from the security of the *howdah*; but this wasn't Warwick's way of doing. The male tiger had risen snarling from his lair, and had been felled at the first shot.

Most of the villagers had supposed that the story would end at this point. Warwick Sahib's tiger hunts were usually just such simple and expeditious affairs. The gun would lift to his shoulder, the quiet eyes would glance along the barrel—and the tiger, whether charging or standing still—would speedily die. But to-day there had been a curious epilogue. Just as the beaters had started toward the fallen animal, and the white Heaven-born's cigarette-case was open in his hand, Nahara, Nahar's great, tawny mate, had suddenly sprung forth from the bamboo thickets.

She drove straight to the nearest of the beaters. There was no time whatever for Warwick to take aim. His rifle leaped, like a live thing, in his arms, but not one of the horri-



fied beaters had seen his eyes lower to the sights. Yet the bullet went home—they could tell by the way the tiger flashed to her breast in the grass.

Yet she was only wounded. One of the beaters, starting, had permitted a bough of a tree to whip Warwick in the face, and the blow had disturbed what little aim he had. It was almost a miracle that he had hit the great cat at all. At once the thickets had closed around her, and the beaters had been unable to drive her forth again.

The circle was silent thereafter. They seemed to be waiting for Khusru, one of the head men of the village, to give his opinion. He knew more about the wild animals than any mature native in the assembly, and his comments on the hunting stories were usually worth hearing.

"We will not be in the honoured service of the Protector of the Poor at this time a year from now," he said.

They all waited tensely. Shikara shivered. "Speak, Khusru," they urged him.

"Warwick Sahib will go again to the jungles—and Nahara will be waiting. She owes two debts. One is the killing of her mate—and ye know that these two tigers have been long and faithful mates. Do ye think she will let that debt go unpaid? She will also avenge her own wound."

"Perhaps she will die of bleeding," one of the others suggested.

"Nay, or ye would have found her this afternoon. Ye know that it is the wounded tiger that is most to be feared. One day, and he will go forth in pursuit of her again; and then ye will not see him riding back so grandly on his elephant. Perhaps she will come here, to carry away *our* children."

Again Shikara tingled—hoping that Nahara would at least come close enough to cause excitement. And that night, too happy to keep silent, he told his mother of Warwick Sahib's smile. "And some time I—I, thine own son," he said as sleepiness came upon him, "will be a killer of tigers, even as Warwick Sahib."

"Little sparrow-hawk," his mother laughed at him. "Little one of mighty words, only the great sahibs that come from afar, and Warwick Sahib himself, may hunt the tiger. So how canst thou, little worthless?"

"I will soon be grown," he persisted, "and I—I, too—will some time return with such a tiger-skin as the great Heaven-born brought this afternoon." Little Shikara was very sleepy, and he was telling his dreams much more frankly than was his wont. "And the village folk will come out to meet me with shoutings, and I will tell them of the shot—in the circle under the tree."

"And where, little hawk, wilt thou procure thine elephants, and such rupees as are needed?"

"Warwick Sahib shoots from the ground—and so will I. And sometimes he goes forth with only one attendant—and I will not need even one. And who can say—perhaps he will find me even a bolder man than Gunga Singhai; and he will take me in his place on the hunts in the jungles."

For Gunga Singhai was Warwick Sahib's own personal attendant and gun-carrier—the native that the Protector of the Poor could trust in the tightest places. So it was only to be expected that Little Shikara's mother should laugh at him. The idea of her son being an attendant of Warwick Sahib, not to mention a hunter of tigers, was only a tale to tell her husband when the boy's bright eyes were closed in sleep.

"Nay, little man," she told him. "Would I want thee torn to pieces in Nahara's claws? Would I want thee smelling of the jungle again, as thou didst after chasing the water-buck through the bamboos? Nay—thou wilt be a herdsman, like thy father—and perhaps gather many rupees."

But Little Shikara did not want to think of rupees. Even now, as sleep came to him, his childish spirit had left the circle of thatch roofs, and had gone on tremulous expeditions into the jungle. Far away, the trumpet-call of a wild tusker trembled through the moist, hot night; and great bell-shaped flowers made the air pungent and heavy with perfume. A tigress skulked somewhere in a thicket licking an injured leg with her rough tongue, pausing to listen to every sound the night gave forth. Little Shikara whispered in his sleep.

A half mile distant, in his richly furnished bungalow, Warwick Sahib dozed over his after-dinner cigar. He was in evening clothes, and crystal and silver glittered on his board. But his gray eyes were half closed; and the gleam from his plate

could not pass the long, dark lashes. For his spirit was far distant, too—on the jungle trails with that of Little Shikara.

## II

ONE sunlit morning, perhaps a month after the skin of Nahar was brought in from the jungle, Warwick Sahib's mail was late. It was an unheard-of thing. Always before, just as the clock struck eight, he would hear the cheerful tinkle of the postman's bells. At first he considered complaining; but as morning drew to early afternoon he began to believe that investigation would be the wiser course.

The postman's route carried him along an old elephant trail through a patch of thick jungle beside one of the tributaries of the Manipur. When natives went out to look, he was neither on the path nor drowned in the creek, nor yet in his thatched hut at the other end of his route. The truth was that this particular postman's bells would never be heard by human ears again. And there was enough evidence in the wet mould of the trail to know what had occurred.

That night the circle under the tree was silent and shivering. "Who is next?" they asked of one another. The jungle night came down, breathless and mysterious, and now and then a twig was cracked by a heavy foot at the edge of the thickets. In Warwick's house, the great Protector of the Poor took his rifles from their cases and fitted them together.

"To-morrow," he told Gunga Singhai, "we will settle for that postman's death." Singhai breathed deeply, but said nothing. Perhaps his dark eyes brightened. The tiger-hunts were nearly as great a delight to him as they were to Warwick himself.

But while Nahara, lame from Warwick's bullet, could no longer overtake cattle, she did with great skilfulness avoid the onrush of the beaters. Again Little Shikara waited at the village gate for his hero to return; but the beaters walked silently to-night. Nor were there any tales to be told under the tree.

Nahara, a fairly respectable cattle-killer before, had become in a single night one of the worst terrors of India. Of course she was still a coward, but she had learned, by virtue

of a chance meeting with a postman on a trail after a week of heart-devouring starvation, two or three extremely portentous lessons. One of them was that not even the little deer, drinking beside the Manipur, died half so easily as these tall, forked forms of which she had previously been so afraid. She found out also that they could neither run swiftly nor walk silently, and they could be approached easily even by a tiger that cracked a twig with every step. It simplified the problem of living immensely; and just as any other feline would have done, she took the line of least resistance. If there had been plenty of carrion in the jungle, Nahara might never have hunted men. But the kites and the jackals looked after the carrion; and they were much swifter and keener-eyed than a lame tiger.

She knew enough not to confine herself to one village; and it is rather hard to explain how any lower creature, that obviously cannot reason, could have possessed this knowledge. Perhaps it was because she had learned that a determined hunt, with many beaters and men on elephants, invariably followed her killings. It was always well to travel just as far as possible from the scene. She found out also that, just as a doe is easier felled than a horned buck, certain of this new kind of game were more easily taken than the others. Sometimes children played at the door of their huts, and sometimes old men were afflicted with such maladies that they could not flee at all. All these things Nahara learned; and in learning them she caused a certain civil office of the British Empire to put an exceedingly large price on her head.

Gradually the fact dawned on her that unlike the deer and the buffalo, this new game was more easily hunted in the daylight—particularly in that tired-out, careless twilight hour when the herders and the plantation hands came in from their work. At night the village folk kept in their huts, and such wood-cutters and gipsies as slept without wakened every hour to tend their fires. Nahara was deathly afraid of fire. Night after night she would creep round and round a gipsy camp, her eyes like two pale blue moons in the darkness, and would never dare attack.

And because she was taking her living in a manner forbidden by the laws of the jungle, the glory and beauty of her youth quickly departed from her. There are no prisons for

those that break the jungle laws, no courts and no appointed officers; but because these are laws that go down to the roots of life, punishment is always swift and inevitable. "Thou shalt not kill men," is the first law of the wild creatures; and everyone knows that any animal or breed of animals that breaks this law has sooner or later been hunted down and slain—just like any other murderer. The mange came upon her, and she lost flesh, and certain of her teeth began to come out. She was no longer the beautiful female of her species, to be sung to by the weaver-birds as she passed beneath. She was a hag and a vampire, hatred of whom lay deep in every human heart in her hunting range.

Often the hunting was poor, and sometimes she went many days in a stretch without making a single kill. And in all beasts, high and low, this is the last step to the worst degeneracy of all. It instils a curious, terrible kind of blood-lust—to kill, not once, but as many times as possible in the same hunt; to be content not with one death, but to slay and slay until the whole herd is destroyed. It is the instinct that makes a little weasel kill all the chickens in a coop, when one was all it could possibly carry away, and that will cause a wolf to leap from sheep to sheep in a fold until every one is dead. Nahara didn't get a chance to kill every day; so when the opportunity did come, like a certain pitiable kind of human hunter who comes from afar to hunt small game, she killed as many times as she could in quick succession. And the British Empire raised the price on her head.

One afternoon found her within a half mile of Warwick's bungalow, and for five days she had gone without food. One would not have thought of her as a royal tigress, the queen of the felines and one of the most beautiful of all living things. And since she was still tawny and graceful, it would be hard to understand why she no longer gave the impression of beauty. It was simply gone, as a flame goes, and her queenliness was wholly departed, too. In some vague way she had become a poisonous, a ghastly thing, to be named with such outcasts as the jackals or hyenas.

Excessive hunger, in most of the flesh-eating animals, is really a first cousin to madness. It brings bad dreams and visions, and, worst of all, it induces an insubordination to all the forest laws of man and beast. A well-fed wolf-pack will

run in stark panic from a human being; but even the wisest of mountaineers do not care to meet the same gray band in the starving times of winter. Starvation brings recklessness, a desperate frenzied courage that is likely to upset all of one's preconceived notions as to the behaviour of animals. It also brings, so that all men may be aware of its presence, a peculiar lurid glow to the balls of the eyes.

In fact, the two pale circles of fire were the most noticeable characteristics of the long, tawny cat that crept through the bamboos. Except for them, she would hardly have been discernible at all. The yellow grass made a perfect background, her black stripes looked like the streaks of shadow between the stalks of bamboo, and for one that is lame she crept with an astounding silence. One couldn't have believed that such a great creature could lie so close to the earth and be so utterly invisible in the low thickets.

A little peninsula of dwarf bamboos and tall jungle grass extended out into the pasture before the village and Nahara crept out clear to its point. She didn't seem to be moving. One couldn't catch the stir and draw of muscles. And yet she slowly glided to the end; then began her wait. Her head sunk low, her body grew tense, her tail whipped softly back and forth, with as easy a motion as the swaying of a serpent. The light flamed and died and flamed and died again in her pale eyes.

Soon a villager who had been working in Warwick's fields came trotting in Oriental fashion across the meadow. His eyes were only human, and he did not see the tawny shape in the tall grass. If any one had told him that a full-grown tigress could have crept to such a place and still remained invisible, he would have laughed. He was going to his thatched hut, to brown wife and babies, and it was no wonder that he trotted swiftly. The muscles of the great cat bunched, and now the whipping tail began to have a little vertical motion that is the final warning of a spring.

The man was already in leaping range; but the tiger had learned, in many experiences, always to make sure. Still she crouched—a single instant in which the trotting native came two paces nearer. Then the man drew up with a gasp of fright.

For just as the clear outlines of an object that has long

been concealed in a maze of light and shadow will often leap, with sudden vividness, to the eyes, the native suddenly perceived the tiger.

He caught the whole dread picture—the crouching form, the terrible blue lights of the eyes, the whipping tail. The gasp he uttered from his closing throat seemed to act like the fall of a firing-pin against a shell on the bunched muscles of the animal; and she left her covert in a streak of tawny light.

But Nahara's leaps had never been quite accurate since she had been wounded by Warwick's bullet, months before. They were usually straight enough for the general purposes of hunting, but they missed by a long way the "theoretical centre of impact" of which artillery officers speak. Her lame paw always seemed to disturb her balance. By remembering it, she could usually partly overcome the disadvantage; but to-day, in the madness of her hunger, she had been unable to remember anything except the terrible rapture of killing. This circumstance alone, however, would not have saved the native's life. Even though her fangs missed his throat, the power of the blow and her rending talons would have certainly snatched away his life as a storm snatches a leaf. But there was one other determining factor. The Burman had seen the tiger just before she leaped; and although there had been no time for conscious thought, his guardian reflexes had flung him to one side in a single frenzied effort to miss the full force of the spring.

The result of both these things was that he received only an awkward, sprawling blow from the animal's shoulder. Of course he was hurled to the ground; for no human body in the world is built to withstand the ton or so of shocking power of a three-hundred-pound cat leaping through the air. The tigress sprawled down also, and because she lighted on her wounded paw, she squealed with pain. It was possibly three seconds before she had forgotten the stabbing pain in her paw and had gathered herself to spring on the unconscious form of the native. And that three seconds gave Warwick Sahib, sitting at the window of his study, an opportunity to seize his rifle and fire.

Warwick knew tigers, and he had kept the rifle always ready for just such a need as this. The distance was nearly

five hundred yards, and the bullet went wide of its mark. Nevertheless, it saved the native's life. The great cat remembered this same far-off explosion from another day, in a dry creek-bed of months before, and the sing of the bullet was a remembered thing, too. Although it would speedily return to her, her courage fled and she turned and faced into the bamboos.

In an instant, Warwick was on his great veranda, calling his beaters. Gunga Singhai, his faithful gun-carrier, slipped shells into the magazine of his master's high-calibered close-range tiger-rifle. "The elephant, Sahib?" he asked swiftly.

"Nay, this will be on foot. Make the beaters circle about the fringe of bamboos. Thou and I will cross the eastern fields and shoot at her as she breaks through."

But there was really no time to plan a complete campaign. Even now, the first gray of twilight was blurring the sharp outlines of the jungle, and the soft jungle night was hovering, ready to descend. Warwick's plan was to cut through to a certain little creek that flowed into the river and with Singhai to continue on to the edge of the bamboos that overlooked a wide field. The beaters would prevent the tigress from turning back beyond the village, and it was at least possible that he would get a shot at her as she burst from the jungle and crossed the field to the heavier thickets beyond.

"Warwick Sahib walks into the teeth of [his enemy]," Khusru, the hunter, told a little group that watched from the village gate. "Nahara will collect her debts."

A little brown boy shivered at his words and wondered if the beaters would turn and kick him, as they had always done before, if he should attempt to follow them. It was the tiger-hunt, in view of his own village, and he sat down, tremulous with rapture, in the grass to watch. It was almost as if his dream—that he himself should be a hunter of tigers—was coming true. He wondered why the beaters seemed to move so slowly and with so little heart.

He would have known if he could have looked into their eyes. Each black pupil was framed with white. Human hearts grow shaken and bloodless from such sights as this they had just seen, and only the heart of a jungle creature—the heart of the eagle that the jungle gods, by some unheard-of fortune, had put in the breast of Little Shikara



—could prevail against them. Besides, the superstitious Burmans thought that Warwick was walking straight to death—that the time had come for Nahara to collect her debts.

### III

WARWICK SAHIB and Singhai disappeared at once into the fringe of jungle, and silence immediately fell upon them. The cries of the beaters at once seemed curiously dim. It was as if no sound could live in the great silences under the arching trees. Soon it was as if they were alone.

They walked side by side, Warwick with his rifle held ready. He had no false ideas in regard to this tiger-hunt. He knew that his prey was desperate with hunger, that she had many old debts to pay, and that she would charge on sight.

The self-rage that is felt on missing some particularly fortunate chance is not confined to human beings alone. There is an old saying in the forest that a feline that has missed his stroke is like a jackal in dog-days—and that means that it is not safe to be anywhere in the region with him. He simply goes rabid and is quite likely to leap at the first living thing that stirs. Warwick knew that Nahara had just been cheated out of her kill and someone in the jungle would pay for it.

The gaudy birds that looked down from the tree-branches could scarcely recognize this prematurely gray man as a hunter. He walked rather quietly, yet with no conscious effort toward stealth. The rifle rested easily in his arms, his gray eyes were quiet and thoughtful as always. Singularly, his splendid features were quite in repose. The Burman, however, had more of the outer signs of alertness; and yet there was none of the blind terror upon him that marked the beaters.

"Where are the men?" Warwick asked quietly. "It is strange that we do not hear them shouting."

"They are afraid, Sahib," Singhai replied. "The forest pigs have left us to do our own hunting."

Warwick corrected him with a smile. "Forest pigs are brave enough," he answered. "They are sheep—just sheep—sheep of the plains."

The broad trail divided, like a three-tined candlestick, into

narrow trails. Warwick halted beside the centre of the three that led to the creek they were obliged to cross. Just for an instant he stood watching, gazing into the deep-blue dusk of the deeper jungle. Twilight was falling softly. The trails soon vanished into shadow—patches of deep gloom, relieved here and there by a bright leaf that reflected the last twilight rays. A living creature coughed and rustled away in the thickets beside him.

"There is little use of going on," he said. "It is growing too dark. But there will be killings before the dawn if we don't get her first."

The servant stood still, waiting. It was not his place to advise his master.

"If we leave her, she'll come again before the dawn. Many of the herders haven't returned—she'll get one of them sure. At least we may cross the creek and get a view of the great fields. She is certain to cross them if she has heard the beaters."

In utter silence they went on. One hundred yards farther they came to the creek, and both strode in together to ford.

The water was only knee-deep, but Warwick's boots sank three inches in the mud of the bottom. And at that instant the gods of the jungle, always waiting with drawn scimitar for the unsuspecting, turned against them.

Singhai suddenly splashed down into the water, on his hands and knees. He did not cry out. If he made any sound at all, it was just a shivering gasp that the splash of water wholly obscured. But the thing that brought home the truth to Warwick was the pain that flashed, vivid as lightning, across his dark face; and the horror of death that left its shadow. Something churned and writhed in the mud; and then Warwick fired.

Both of them had forgotten Mugger, the crocodile, that so loves to wait in the mud of a ford. He had seized Singhai's foot, and had already snatched him down into the water when Warwick fired. No living flesh can withstand the terrible, rending shock of a high-powered sporting rifle at close range. Mugger had plates of armour, but even these could not have availed against it if he had been exposed to the fire. As it was, several inches of water stood between, a more

effective armour than a two-inch steel plate on a battleship. Of course the shock carried through, a smashing blow that caused the reptile to release his hold on Singhai's leg; but before the native could get to his feet he had struck again. The next instant both men were fighting for their lives.

They fought with their hands, and Warwick fought with his rifle, and the native slashed again and again with the long knife that he carried at his belt. To a casual glance, a crocodile is wholly incapable of quick action. These two found him a slashing, darting, wolf-like thing, lunging with astounding speed through the muddied water, knocking them from their feet and striking at them as they fell.

The reptile was only half grown, but in the water they had none of the usual advantages that man has over the beasts with which he does battle. Warwick could not find a target for his rifle. But even human bodies, usually so weak, find themselves possessed of an amazing reserve strength and agility in the moment of need. These men realized perfectly that their lives were the stakes for which they fought, and they gave every ounce of strength and energy they had. Their aim was to hold the mugger off until they could reach the shore.

At last, by a lucky stroke, Singhai's knife blinded one of the lurid reptile eyes. He was prone in the water when he administered it, and it went home just as the savage teeth were snapping at his throat. For an instant the great reptile flopped in an impotent half-circle, partly reared out of the water. It gave Warwick a chance to shoot, a single instant in which the rifle seemed to whirl about in his arms, drive to his shoulder, and blaze in the deepening twilight. And the shot went true. It pierced the mugger from beneath, tearing upward through the brain. And then the agitated waters of the ford slowly grew quiet.

The last echo of the report was dying when Singhai stretched his bleeding arms about Warwick's body, caught up the rifle and dragged them forty feet up on the shore. It was an effort that cost the last of his strength. And as the stars popped out of the sky, one by one, through the gray of dusk, the two men lay silent, side by side, on the grassy bank.

Warwick was the first to regain consciousness. At first

he didn't understand the lashing pain in his wrists, the strange numbness in one of his legs, the darkness with the great white Indian stars shining through. Then he remembered. And he tried to stretch his arm to the prone form beside him.

The attempt was an absolute failure. The cool brain dispatched the message, it flew along the telegraph-wires of the nerves, but the muscles refused to react. He remembered that the teeth of the mugger had met in one of the muscles of his upper arm, but before unconsciousness had come upon him he had been able to lift the gun to shoot. Possibly infection from the bite had in some manner temporarily paralyzed the arm. He turned, wracked with pain, on his side and lifted his left arm. In doing so his hand crossed before his eyes—and then he smiled wanly in the darkness.

It was quite like Warwick, sportsman and English gentleman, to smile at a time like this. Even in the gray darkness of the jungle night he could see the hand quite plainly. It no longer looked slim and white. And he remembered that the mugger had caught his fingers in one of its last rushes.

He paused only for one glance at the mutilated member. He knew that his first work was to see how Singhai had fared. In that glance he was boundlessly relieved to see that the hand could unquestionably be saved. The fingers were torn, yet their bones did not seem to be severed. Temporarily at least, however, the hand was utterly useless. The fingers felt strange and detached.

He reached out to the still form beside him, touching the dark skin first with his fingers, and then, because they had ceased to function, with the flesh of his wrist. He expected to find it cold. Singhai was alive, however, and his warm blood beat close to the dark skin.

But he was deeply unconscious, and it was possible that one foot was hopelessly mutilated.

For a moment Warwick lay quite still, looking his situation squarely in the face. He did not believe that either he or his attendant was mortally or even very seriously hurt. True, one of his arms had suffered paralysis, but there was no reason for thinking it had been permanently injured. His hand would be badly scarred, but soon as good as ever. The real question that faced them was that of getting back to the bungalow.

Walking was out of the question. His whole body was bruised and lacerated, and he was already dangerously weak from loss of blood. It would take all his energy, these first few hours, to keep his consciousness. Besides, it was perfectly obvious that Singhai could not walk. And English gentlemen do not desert their servants at a time like this. The real mystery lay in the fact that the beaters had not already found and rescued them.

He wore a watch with luminous dial on his left wrist, and he managed to get it before his eyes. And then understanding came to him. A full hour had passed since he and his servant had fought the mugger in the ford. And the utter silence of early night had come down over the jungle.

There was only one thing to believe. The beaters had evidently heard him shoot, sought in vain for him in the thickets, possibly passed within a few hundred feet of him, and because he had been unconscious he had not heard them or called to them, and now they had given him up for lost. He remembered with bitterness how all of them had been sure that an encounter with Nahara would cost him his life, and would thus be all the more quick to believe he had died in her talons. Nahara had her mate and her own lameness to avenge, they had said, attributing in their superstition human emotions to the brute natures of animals. It would have been quite useless for Warwick to attempt to tell them that the male tiger, in the mind of her wicked mate, was no longer even a memory, and that premeditated vengeance is an emotion almost unknown in the animal world. Without leaders or encouragement, and terribly frightened by the scene they had beheld before the village, they had quickly given up any attempt to find his body. There had been none among them coolheaded enough to reason out which trail he had likely taken, and thus look for him by the ford. Likely they were already huddled in their thatched huts, waiting till daylight.

Then he called in the darkness. A heavy body brushed through the creepers, and stepping falsely, broke a twig. He thought at first that it might be one of the villagers, coming to look for him. But at once the step was silenced.

Warwick had a disturbing thought that the creature that had broken the twig had not gone away, but was crouching

down, in a curious manner, in the deep shadows. Nahara had returned to her hunting.

#### IV

"SOME time I, too, will be a hunter of tigers," Little Shikara told his mother when the beaters began to circle through the bamboos. "To carry a gun beside Warwick Sahib—and to be honoured in the circle under the tree!"

But his mother hardly listened. She was quivering with fright. She had seen the last part of the drama in front of the village; and she was too frightened even to notice the curious imperturbability of her little son. But there was no orderly retreat after Little Shikara had heard the two reports of the rifle. At first there were only the shouts of the beaters, singularly high-pitched, much running back and forth in the shadows, and then a pell-mell scurry to the shelter of the villages.

For a few minutes there was wild excitement at the village gates. Warwick Sahib was dead, they said—they had heard the shots and run to the place of firing, and beat up and down through the bamboos; and Warwick Sahib had surely been killed and carried off by the tigress. This dreadful story told, most of the villagers went to hide at once in their huts; only a little circle of the bravest men hovered at the gate. They watched with drawn faces the growing darkness.

But there was one among them who was not yet a man grown; a boy so small that he could hover, unnoticed, in the very smallest of the terrible shadow-patches. He was Little Shikara, and he was shocked to the very depths of his worshipping heart. For Warwick had been his hero, the greatest man of all time, and he felt himself burning with indignation that the beaters should return so soon. And it was a curious fact that he had not as yet been infected with the contagion of terror that was being passed from man to man among the villagers. Perhaps his indignation was too absorbing an emotion to leave room for terror, and perhaps, far down in his childish spirit, he was made of different stuff. He was a child of the jungle, and perhaps he had shared of that great imperturbability and impassiveness that is the eternal trait of the wildernesses.

He went up to one of the younger beaters who had told and retold a story of catching a glimpse of Nahara in the thickets until no one was left to tell it to. He was standing silent, and Little Shikara thought it possible that he might reach his ears.

"Give ear, Puran," he pleaded. "Didst thou look for his body beside the ford over Tarai stream?"

"Nay, little one—though I passed within one hundred paces."

"Dost thou not know that he and Singhai would of a certainty cross at the ford to reach the fringe of jungle from which he might watch the eastern field? Some of you looked on the trail beside the ford, but none looked at the ford itself. And the sound of the rifle seemed to come from thence."

"But why did he not call out?"

"Dead men could not call, but at least ye might have frightened Nahara from the body. But perhaps he is wounded, unable to speak, and lies there still——"

But Puran had found another listener for his story, and speedily forgot the boy. He hurried over to another of the villagers, Khusru the hunter.

"Did no one look by the ford?" he asked, almost sobbing. "For that is the place he had gone."

The native's eyes seemed to light. "*Hai*, little one, thou hast thought of what thy elders had forgotten. There is level land there, and clear. And I shall go at the first ray of dawn——"

"But not to-night, Khusru——?"

"Nay, little sinner! Wouldst thou have me torn to pieces?"

Lastly Little Shikara went to his own father, and they had a moment's talk at the outskirts of the throng. But the answer was nay—just the same. Even his brave father would not go to look for the body until daylight came. The boy felt his skin prickling all over.

"But perhaps he is only wounded—and left to die. If I go and return with word that he is there, wilt thou take others and go out and bring him in?"

"*Thou* goest!" His father broke forth in a great roar of laughter. "Why, thou little hawk! One would think that thou wert a hunter of tigers thyself!"

Little Shikara blushed beneath the laughter. For he was a very boyish little boy in most ways. But it seemed to him that his sturdy young heart was about to break open from bitterness. All of them agreed that Warwick Sahib, perhaps wounded and dying, might be lying by the ford, but none of them would venture forth to see. Unknowing, he was beholding the expression of a certain age-old trait of human nature. Men do not fight ably in the dark. They need their eyes, and they particularly require a definite object to give them determination. If these villagers knew for certain that the Protector of the Poor lay wounded or even dead beside the ford, they would have rallied bravely, encouraged one another with words and oaths, and gone forth to rescue him; but they wholly lacked the courage to venture again into the jungle on any such blind quest as Little Shikara suggested.

But the boy's father should not have laughed. He should have remembered the few past occasions when his straight little son had gone into the jungle alone; and that remembrance should have silenced him. The difficulty lay in the fact that he supposed his boy and he were of the same flesh, and that Little Shikara shared his own great dread of the night-curtained jungle. In this he was very badly mistaken. Little Shikara had an inborn understanding and love of the jungle; and except for such material dangers as that of Nahara, he was not afraid of it at all. He had no superstitions in regard to it. Perhaps he was too young. But the main thing that the laugh did was to set off, as a match sets off powder, a whole heartful of unexploded indignation in Shikara's breast. These villagers not only had deserted their patron and protector, but also they had laughed at the thought of rescue! His own father had laughed at him.

Little Shikara silently left the circle of villagers and turned into the darkness.

At once the jungle silence closed round him. He hadn't dreamed that the noise of the villagers would die so quickly. Although he could still see the flame of the fire at the village gate behind him, it was almost as if he had at once dropped off into another world. Great flowers poured perfume down upon him, and at seemingly a great distance he heard the faint murmur of the wind.



At first, deep down in his heart, he had really not intended to go all the way. He had expected to steal clear to the outer edge of the firelight; and then stand listening to the darkness for such impressions as the jungle would choose to give him. But there had been no threshold, no interlude of preparation. The jungle in all its mystery had folded about him at once.

He trotted softly down the elephant trail, a dim, fleet shadow that even the keen eyes of Nahara could scarcely have seen. At first he was too happy to be afraid. He was always happy when the jungle closed round him. Besides, if Nahara had killed, she would be full-fed by now and not to be feared. Little Shikara hastened on, trembling all over with a joyous sort of excitement.

If a single bird had flapped its wings in the branches, if one little rodent had stirred in the underbrush, Little Shikara would likely have turned back. But the jungle-gods, knowing their son, stilled all the forest voices. He crept on, still looking now and again over his shoulder to see the village fire. It still made a bright yellow triangle in the dusk behind him. He didn't stop to think that he was doing a thing most grown natives and many white men would not have dared to do—to follow a jungle trail unarmed at night. If he had stopped to think at all he simply would have been unable to go on. He was only following his instincts, voices that such forces as maturity and grown-up intelligence and self-consciousness obscure in older men—and the terror of the jungle could not touch him. He went straight to do what service he could for the white sahib that was one of his lesser gods.

Time after time he halted, but always he pushed on a few more feet. Now he was over halfway to the ford, clear to the forks in the trail. And then he turned about with a little gasp of fear.

The light from the village had gone out. The thick foliage of the jungle had come between.

He was really frightened now. It wasn't that he was afraid he couldn't get back. The trail was broad and hard and quite gray in the moonlight. But those far-off beams of light had been a solace to his spirit, a reminder that he had not yet broken all ties with the village. He halted, intending to turn back.

Then a thrill began at his scalp and went clear to his bare toes. Faint through the jungle silences he heard Warwick Sahib calling to his faithless beaters. The voice had an unmistakable quality of distress.

Certain of the villagers—a very few of them—said afterward that Little Shikara continued on because he was afraid to go back. They said that he looked upon the Heaven-born sahib as a source of all power, in whose protection no harm could befall him, and he sped toward him because the distance was shorter than back to the haven of fire at the village. But those who could look deeper into Little Shikara's soul knew different. In some degree at least he hastened on down that jungle trail of peril because he knew that his idol was in distress, and by laws that went deep he knew he must go to his aid.

## V

THE first few minutes after Warwick had heard a living step in the thickets he spent in trying to reload his rifle. He carried other cartridges in the right-hand trousers pocket, but after a few minutes of futile effort it became perfectly evident that he was not able to reach them. His right arm was useless, and the fingers of his left, lacerated by the mugger's bite, refused to take hold.

He had, however, three of the five shells the rifle held still in his gun. The single question that remained was whether or not they would be of use to him.

The rifle lay half under him, its stock protruding from beneath his body. With the elbow of his left arm he was able to work it out. Considering the difficulties under which he worked, he made amazingly few false motions; and yet he worked with swiftmess. Warwick was a man who had been schooled and trained by many dangers; he had learned to face them with open eyes and steady hands, to judge with unclouded thought the exact percentage of his chances. He knew now that he must work swiftly. The shape in the shadow was not going to wait all night.

But at that moment the hope of preserving his life that he had clung to until now broke like a bubble in the sunlight. He could not lift the gun to swing and aim it at a shape in

the darkness. With his mutilated hands he could not cock the strong-sprung hammer. And if he could do both these things with his fumbling, bleeding, lacerated fingers, his right hand could not be made to pull the trigger. Warwick Sahib knew at last just where he stood. Yet if human sight could have penetrated that dusk, it would have beheld no change of expression in the lean face.

An English gentleman lay at the frontier of death. But that occasioned neither fawning nor a loss of his rigid self-control.

Two things remained, however, that he might do. One was to call and continue to call, as long as life lasted in his body. He knew perfectly that more than once in the history of India a tiger had been kept at a distance, at least for a short period of time, by shouts alone. In that interlude, perhaps help might come from the village. The second thing was almost as impossible as raising and firing the rifle; but by the luck of the gods he might achieve it. He wanted to find Singhai's knife and hold it compressed in his palm.

It wasn't that he had any vain hopes of repelling the tiger's attack with a single knife-blade that would be practically impossible for his mutilated hand to hold. Nahara had five or so knife-blades in every paw and a whole set of them in her mouth. She could stand on four legs and fight, and Warwick could not lift himself on one elbow and yet wield the blade. But there were other things to be done with blades, even held loosely in the palm, at a time like this.

He knew rather too much of the way of tigers. They do not always kill swiftly. It is the tiger way to tease, long moments, with half-bared talons; to let the prey crawl away a few feet for the rapture of leaping at it again; to fondle with an exquisite cruelty for moments that seem endless to its prey. A knife, on the other hand, kills quickly. Warwick much preferred the latter death.

And even as he called, again and again, he began to feel about in the grass with his lacerated hand for the hilt of the knife. Nahara was steadily stealing toward him through the shadows.

The great tigress was at the height of her hunting madness. The earlier adventure of the evening when she had missed her stroke, the stir and tumult of the beaters in the wood,

her many days of hunger, had all combined to intensify her passion. And finally there had come the knowledge, in subtle ways, that two of her own kind of game were lying wounded and helpless beside the ford.

But even the royal tiger never forgets some small measure of its caution. She did not charge at once. The game looked so easy that it was in some way suggestive of a trap. She crept forward, a few feet at a time. The wild blood began to leap through the great veins. The hair went stiff on the neck muscles.

But Warwick shouted; and the sound for an instant appalled her. She lurked in the shadows. And then, as she made a false step, Warwick heard her for the first time.

Again she crept forward, to pause when Warwick raised his voice the second time. The man knew enough to call at intervals rather than continuously. A long, continued outcry would very likely stretch the tiger's nerves to a breaking point and hurl her into a frenzy that would probably result in a death-dealing charge. Every few seconds he called again. In the intervals between the tiger crept forward. Her excitement grew upon her. She crouched lower. Her sinewy tail had whipped softly at first; now it was lashing almost to her sides. And finally it began to have a slight vertical movement that Warwick, fortunately for his spirit, could not see.

Then the little light that the moon poured down was suddenly reflected in Nahara's eyes. All at once they burned out of the dusk; two blue-green circles of fire fifty feet distant in the darkness. At that Warwick gasped—for the first time. In another moment the great cat would be in range—and he had not yet found the knife. Nothing remained to believe but that it was lost in the mud of the ford, fifty feet distant, and that the last dread avenue of escape was cut off.

But at that instant the gasp gave way to a whispered oath of wonder. Some living creature was running lightly down the trail toward him—soft, light feet that came with amazing swiftness. For once in his life Warwick did not know where he stood. For once he was the chief figure of a situation he did not entirely understand. He tried to probe into the darkness with his tired eyes.

"Here I am!" he called. The tiger, starting to creep for-

ward once more, halted at the voice. A small straight figure sped like an arrow out of the thickets and halted at his side.

It was such an astounding appearance as for an instant completely paralyzes the mental faculties. Warwick's first emotion was simply a great and hopeless astonishment. Long inured to the mystery of the jungle, he thought he had passed the point where any earthly happening could actually bewilder him. But in spite of it, in spite of the fire-eyed peril in the darkness, he was quite himself when he spoke. The voice that came out of the silence was wholly steady—a kindly, almost amused voice of one who knows life as it is and who has mastered his own destiny.

"Who in the world?" he asked in the vernacular.

"It is I—Little Shikara," a tremulous voice answered. Except for the tremor he could not keep from his tone, he spoke as one man to another.

Warwick knew at once that Little Shikara was not yet aware of the presence of the tiger fifty feet distant in the shadows. But he knew nothing else. The whole situation was beyond his ken.

But his instincts were manly and true. "Then run speedily, little one," he whispered, "back to the village. There is danger here in the dark."

Little Shikara tried to speak, and he swallowed painfully. A lump had come in his throat that at first would not let him talk. "Nay, Protector of the Poor!" he answered. "I—I came alone. And I—I am thy servant."

Warwick's heart bounded. Not since his youth had left him to a gray world had his strong heart leaped in just this way before. "Merciful God!" he whispered in English: "Has a child come to save me?" Then he whipped again into the vernacular and spoke swiftly; for no further seconds were to be wasted. "Little Shikara, have you ever fired a gun?"

"No, Sahib——"

"Then lift it up and rest it across my body. Thou knowest how it is held——"

Little Shikara didn't know exactly, but he rested the gun on Warwick's body; and he had seen enough target practice to crook his finger about the trigger. And together, the

strangest pair of huntsmen that the Indian stars ever looked down upon, they waited.

"It is Nahara," Warwick explained softly. For he had decided to be frank with Little Shikara, trusting all to the courage of a child. "It all depends on thee. Pull back the hammer with thy thumb."

Little Shikara obeyed. He drew it back until it clicked, and did not, as Warwick had feared, let it slip through his fingers back against the breach. "Yes, Sahib," he whispered breathlessly. His little brave heart seemed about to explode in his breast. But it was the test, and he knew he must not waver in the sahib's eyes.

"It is Nahara, and thou art a man," Warwick said again. "And now thou must wait until thou seest her eyes."

So they strained into the darkness; and in an instant more they saw again the two circles of greenish, smouldering fire. They were quite near now—Nahara was almost in leaping range.

"Thou wilt look through the little hole at the rear and then along the barrel," Warwick ordered swiftly, "and thou must see the two eyes along the little notch in front."

"I see, Sahib—and between the eyes," came the same breathless whisper. The little brown body held quite still. Warwick could not even feel it trembling against his own. For the moment, by virtue of some strange prank of Shiv, the jungle-gods were giving their own strength to this little brown son of theirs beside the ford.

"Thou wilt not jerk or move?"

"Nay, Sahib." And he spoke true. The world might break to pieces or blink out, but he would not throw off his aim by any terror motions. They could see the tiger's outline now—the lithe, low-hung body, the tail that twitched up and down.

"Then pull the trigger," Warwick whispered.

The whole jungle world rocked and trembled from the violence of the report.

When the villagers, aroused by the roar of the rifle and led by Khusru and Puran and Little Shikara's father, rushed down with their firebrands to the ford, their first thought was that they had come only to the presence of the dead. Three

human beings lay very still beside the stream, and fifty feet in the shadows something else, that obviously was *not* a human being, lay very still, too. But they were not to have any such horror story to tell their wives. Only one of the three by the ford, Singhai, the gun-bearer, was even really unconscious; Little Shikara, the rifle still held lovingly in his arms, had gone into a half-faint from fear and nervous exhaustion, and Warwick Sahib had merely closed his eyes to the darting light of the firebrands. The only death that had occurred was that of Nahara the tigress—and she had a neat hole bored completely through her neck. To all evidence, she had never stirred after Little Shikara's bullet had gone home.

After much confusion and shouting and falling over one another, and gazing at Little Shikara as if he were some new kind of a ghost, the villagers got a stretcher each for Singhai and the Protector of the Poor. And when they got them well loaded into them, and Little Shikara had quite come to himself and was standing with some bewilderment in a circle of staring townspeople, a clear, commanding voice ordered that they all be silent. Warwick Sahib was going to make what was the nearest approach to a speech that he had made since various of his friends had decoyed him to a dinner in London some years before.

The words that he said, the short vernacular words that have a way of coming straight to the point, established Little Shikara as a legend through all that corner of British India. It was Little Shikara who had come alone through the jungle, said he; it was Little Shikara's shining eyes that had gazed along the barrel, and it was his own brown finger that had pulled the trigger. Thus, said Warwick, he would get the bounty that the British Government offered—British rupees that to a child's eyes would be past counting. Thus in time, with Warwick's influence, his would be a great voice through all of India. For small as he was, and not yet grown, he was of the true breed.

After the shouting was done, Warwick turned to Little Shikara to see how he thought upon all these things. "Thou shalt have training for the army, little one, where thy good nerve will be of use, and thou shalt be a native officer, along with the sons of princes. I, myself, will see to it, for

I do not hold my life so cheap that I will forget the thing that thou hast done to-night."

And he meant what he said. The villagers stood still when they saw his earnest face. "And what, little hawk, wilt thou have more?" he asked.

Little Shikara trembled and raised his eyes. "Only sometimes to ride with thee, in thy *howdah*, as thy servant, when thou again seekest the tiger."

The whole circle laughed at this. They were just human, after all. Their firebrands were held high, and gleamed on Little Shikara's dusky face, and made a lustre in his dark eyes. The circle, roaring with laughter, did not hear the sahib's reply, but they did see him nod his head.

"I would not dare go without thee now," Warwick told him.

And thus Little Shikara's dreams came true—to be known through many villages as a hunter of tigers, and a brave follower and comrade of the forest trails. And thus he came into his own—in those far-off glades of Burma, in the jungles of the Manipur.



# THE MAN WHO CURSED THE LILIES

By CHARLES TENNEY JACKSON

*From Short Stories*

TEDGE looked from the pilot-house at the sweating deck-hand who stood on the stubby bow of the *Marie Louise* heaving vainly on the pole thrust into the barrier of crushed water hyacinths across the channel.

Crump, the engineer, shot a sullen look at the master ere he turned back to the crude oil motor whose mad pounding rattled the old bayou stern-wheeler from keel to hogchains.

"She's full ahead now!" grunted Crump. And then, with a covert glance at the single passenger sitting on the fore-deck cattle pens, the engineman repeated his warning, "Yeh'll lose the cows, Tedge, if you keep on fightin' the flowers. They're bad f'r feed and water—they can't stand another day o' sun!"

Tedge knew it. But he continued to shake his hairy fist at the deckhand and roar his anathemas upon the flower-choked bayou. He knew his crew was grinning evilly, for they remembered Bill Tedge's year-long feud with the lilies. Crump had bluntly told the skipper he was a fool for trying to push up this little-frequented bayou from Cote Blanche Bay to the higher land of the west Louisiana coast, where he had planned to unload his cattle.

Tedge had bought the cargo himself near Beaumont from a beggared ranchman whose stock had to go on the market because, for seven months, there had been no rain in eastern Texas, and the short-grass range was gone.

Tedge knew where there was feed for the starving animals, and the *Marie Louise* was coming back light. By the Inter-coastal Canal and the shallow string of bays along the Texas-Louisiana line, the bayou boat could crawl safely back to the

grassy swamp lands that fringe the sugar plantations of Bayou Teche. Tedge had bought his living cargo so ridiculously cheap that if half of them stood the journey he would profit. And they would cost him nothing for winter ranging up in the swamp lands. In the spring he would round up what steers had lived and sell them, grass-fat, in New Orleans. He'd land them there with his flap-paddle bayou boat, too, for the *Marie Louise* ranged up and down the Inter-coastal Canal and the uncharted swamp lakes and bays adjoining, trading and thieving and serving the skipper's obscure ends.

Only now, when he turned up Cote Blanche Bay, some hundred miles west of the Mississippi passes, to make the last twenty miles of swamp channel to his landing, he faced his old problem. Summer long the water hyacinths were a pest to navigation on the coastal bayous, but this June they were worse than Tedge had ever seen. He knew the reason: the mighty Mississippi was at high flood, and as always then, a third of its yellow waters were sweeping down the Atchafalaya River on a "short cut" to the Mexican Gulf. And somewhere above, on its west bank, the Atchafalaya levees had broken and the flood waters were all through the coastal swamp channels.

Tedge grimly knew what it meant. He'd have to go farther inland to find his free range, but now, worst of all, the floating gardens of the coast swamps were coming out of the numberless channels on the *crevasse* water.

He expected to fight them as he had done for twenty years with his dirty bayou boat. He'd fight and curse and struggle through the *îles flottantes*, and denounce the Federal Government, because it did not destroy the lilies in the obscure bayous where he traded, as it did on Bayou Teche and Terrebonne, with its pump-boats which sprayed the hyacinths with a mixture of oil and soda until the tops shrivelled and the trailing roots then dragged the flowers to the bottom.

"Yeh'll not see open water till the river cleans the swamps of lilies," growled Crump. "I never seen the beat of 'em! The high water's liftin' 'em from ponds where they never been touched by a boat's wheel and they're out in the channels now. If yeh make the plantations yeh'll have to keep eastward and then up the Atchafalaya and buck the main flood water, Tedge!"

## THE MAN WHO CURSED THE LILIES 31

Tedge knew that, too. But he suddenly broke into curses upon his engineer, his boat, the sea and sky and man. But mostly the lilies. He could see a mile up the bayou between cypress-grown banks, and not a foot of water showed. A solid field of green, waxy leaves and upright purple spikes, jammed tight and moving. That was what made the master rage. They were moving—a flower glacier slipping imperceptibly to the gulf bays. They were moving slowly but inexorably, and his dirty cattle boat, frantically driving into the blockade, was moving backward—stern first!

He hated them with the implacable fury of a man whose fists had lorded his world. A water hyacinth—what was it? He could stamp one to a smear on his deck, but a river of them no man could fight. He swore the lilies had ruined his whisky-running years ago to the Atchafalaya lumber camps; they blocked Grand River when he went to log-towing; they had cost him thousands of dollars for repairs and lost time in his swamp ventures.

Bareheaded under the semi-tropic sun, he glowered at the lily-drift. Then he snarled at Crump to reverse the motor. Tedge would retreat again!

"I'll drive the boat clean around Southwest Pass to get shut of 'em! No feed, huh, for these cows! They'll feed sharks, they will! Huh, Mr. Cowman, the blisterin' lilies cost me five hundred dollars already!"

The lone passenger smoked idly and watched the gaunt cattle staggering, penned in the flat, dead heat of the fore-deck. Tedge cursed him, too, under his breath. Milt Rogers had asked to make the coast run from Beaumont on Tedge's boat. Tedge remembered what Rogers said—he was going to see a girl who lived up Bayou Bœuf above Tedge's destination. Tedge remembered that girl—a Cajan girl whom he once heard singing in the floating gardens while Tedge was battling and cursing to pass the blockade.

He hated her for loving the lilies, and the man for loving her. He burst out again with his volcanic fury at the green and purple horde.

"They're a fine sight to see," mused the other, "after a man's eyes been burned out ridin' the dry range; no rain in nine months up there—nothin' green or pretty in——"

"Pretty!" Tedge seemed to menace with his little shift

eyes. "I wish all them lilies had one neck and I could twist it! Jest one head, and me stompin' it! Yeh!—and all the damned flowers in the world with it! Yeh! And me watchin' 'em die!"

The man from the dry lands smoked idly under the awning. His serenity evoked all the savagery of Tedge's feud with the lilies. Pretty! A man who dealt with cows seeing beauty in anything! Well, the girl did it—that swamp angel this Rogers was going to visit. That Aurelie Frenet who sang in the flower-starred river—that was it! Tedge glowered on the Texan—he hated him, too, because this loveliness gave him peace, while the master of the *Marie Louise* must fume about his wheelhouse, a perspiring madman.

It took an hour for the *Marie* even to retreat and find steerage-way easterly off across a shallow lake, mirroring the marsh shores in the sunset. Across it the bayou boat wheezed and thumped drearily, drowning the bellowing of the dying steers. Once the deckhand stirred and pointed.

"Lilies, Cap'n—pourin' from all the swamps, and dead ahead there now!"

Scowling, Tedge held to the starboard. Yes, there they were—a phalanx of flowers in the dusk. He broke into wild curses at them, his boat, the staggering cattle.

"I'll drive to the open gulf to get rid of 'em! Outside, to sea! Yeh! Stranger, yeh'll see salt water, and lilies drownin' in it! I'll show yeh 'em dead and dried on the sands like dead men's dried bones! Yeh'll see yer pretty flowers a-dyin'!"

The lone cowman ignored the sneer. "You better get the animals to feed and water. Another mornin' of heat and crowdin'——"

"Let 'em rot! Yer pretty flowers done it—pretty flowers—spit o' hell! I knowed 'em—I fought 'em—I'll fight 'em to the death of 'em!"

His little red-rimmed eyes hardly veiled his contempt for Milt Rogers. A cowman, sailing this dusky purple bay to see a girl! A girl who sang in the lily drift—a-sailing on this dirty, reeking bumboat, with cattle dying jammed in the pens! Suddenly Tedge realized a vast malevolent pleasure—he couldn't hope to gain from his perishing cargo; and he began to gloat at the agony spread below his wheelhouse window, and the cattleman's futile pity for them.

"They'll rot on Point Au Fer! We'll heave the stink of them, dead and alive, to the sharks of Au Fer Pass! Drownin' cows in dyin' lilies——"

And the small craft of his brain suddenly awakened coolly above his heat. Why, yes! Why hadn't he thought of it? He swung the stubby nose of the *Marie* more easterly in the hot, windless dusk. After a while the black deckhand looked questioningly up at the master.

"We're takin' round," Tedge grunted, "outside Au Fer!"

The black stretched on the cattle-pen frame. Tedge was a master-hand among the reefs and shoals, even if the flappaddle *Marie* had no business outside. But the sea was nothing but a star-set velvet ribbon on which she crawled like a dirty insect. And no man questioned Tedge's will.

Only, an hour later, the engineman came up and forward to stare into the faster-flowing water. Even now he pointed to a hyacinth clump.

"Yeh!" the master growled. "I'll show yeh, Rogers! Worlds o' flowers! Out o' the swamps and the tide 'll send 'em back again on the reefs. I'll show yeh 'em—dead, dried white like men's bones." Then he began to whisper huskily to his engineer: "It's time fer it. Five hundred fer yeh, Crump—a hundred fer the nigger, or I knock his head in. She brushes the bar, and yer oil tank goes—yeh understand?" He watched a red star in the south.

Crump looked about. No sail or light or coast guard about Au Fer—at low tide not even a skiff could find the passages. He nodded cunningly:

"She's old and fire-fitten. Tedge, I knowed yer mind—I was always waitin' fer the word. It's a place fer it—and yeh say yeh carry seven hundred on them cows? Boat an' cargo—three thousand seven hundred——"

"They'll be that singed and washed in the sands off Au Fer that nobody'll know what they died of!" retorted Tedge thickly. "Yeh, go down, Crump, and lay yer waste and oil right. I trust yeh, Crump—the nigger 'll get his, too. She'll ride high and burn flat, hoggin' in the sand——"

"She's soaked with oil plumb for'ard to the pens now," grunted Crump. "She's fitten to go like a match all along when she bumps——"

He vanished, and the master cunningly watched the ember star southeasterly.

He was holding above it now, to port and landward. The white, hard sands must be shoaling fast under the cattle-freighted *Marie*. It little mattered about the course now; she would grind her nose in the quiet reef shortly.

Tedge merely stared, expectantly awaiting the blow. And when it came he was malevolently disappointed. A mere slithering along over the sand, a creak, a slight jar, and she lay dead in the flat, calm sea—it was ridiculous that that smooth beaching would break an oil tank, that the engine spark would flare the machine waste, leap to the greasy beams and floors.

The wheezy exhaust coughed on; the belt flapped as the paddle wheel kept on its dead shove of the *Marie's* keel into the sand. Hogjaw had shouted and run forward. He was staring into the phosphorescent water circling about the bow when Crump raised his cry:

“Fire—amidships!”

Tedge ran down the after-stairs. Sulphurously he began cursing at the trickle of smoke under the motor frame. It was nothing—a child could have put it out with a bucket of sand. But upon it fell Tedge and the engineer, stamping, shouting, shoving oil-soaked waste upon it, and covertly blocking off the astounded black deckman when he rushed to aid.

“Water, Hogjaw!” roared the master. “She’s gainin’ on us—she’s under the bilge floor now!” He hurled a bucket viciously at his helper. And as they pretended to fight the fire, Crump suddenly began laughing and stood up. The deckman was grinning also. The master watched him narrowly.

“Kick the stuff into the waste under the stairs,” he grunted. “Hogjaw, this here boat’s goin’—yeh understand? We take the skiff and pull to the shrimp camps, and she hogs down and burns——”

The black man was laughing. Then he stopped curiously. “The cows——”

“Damn the cows! I’ll git my money back on ’em! Yeh go lower away on the skiff davits. Yeh don’t ask me nothin’—yeh don’t know nothin’!”

“Sho’, boss! I don’t know nothin’, or see nothin’!”

He swung out of the smoke already drifting greasily up from the foul waist of the *Marie Louise*. A little glare of red was beginning to reflect from the mirrored sea. The ripples of the beaching had vanished; obscurely, undramatically as she had lived, the *Marie Louise* sat on the bar to choke in her own fetid fumes.

Tedge clambered to the upper deck and hurried to his bunk in the wheelhouse. There were papers there he must save—the master's license, the insurance policy, and a few other things. The smell of burning wood and grease was thickening; and suddenly now, through it, he saw the quiet, questioning face of the stranger.

He had forgotten him completely. Tedge's small brain had room but for one idea at a time: first his rage at the lilies, and then the wrecking of the *Marie*. And this man knew. He had been staring down the after-companionway. He had seen and heard. He had seen the master and crew laughing while the fire mounted.

Tedge came to him. "We're quittin' ship," he growled.

"Yes, but the cattle——" The other looked stupefiedly at him.

"We got to pull inside afore the sea comes up——"

"Well, break the pens, can't you? Give 'em a chance to swim for a bar. I'm a cowman myself—I cain't let dumb brutes burn and not lift a hand——"

The fire in the waist was beginning to roar. A plume of smoke streamed straight up in the starlight. The glare showed the younger man's startled eyes. He shifted them to look over the foredeck rail down to the cattle. Sparks were falling among them, the fire veered slightly forward; and the survivors were crowding uneasily over the fallen ones, catching that curious sense of danger which forewarns creatures of the wild before the Northers, a burning forest, or creeping flood, to move on.

"You cain't leave 'em so," muttered the stranger. "No; I seen you——"

He did not finish. Tedge had been setting himself for what he knew he should do. The smaller man had his jaw turned as he stared at the suffering brutes. And Tedge's mighty fist struck him full on the temple. The master leaned over the low rail to watch quietly.

The man who wished to save the cattle was there among them. A little flurry of sparks drove over the spot he fell upon, and then a maddened surge of gaunt steers. Tedge wondered if he should go finish the job. No; there was little use. He had crashed his fist into the face of a shrimp-seine hauler once, and the fellow's neck had shifted on his spine—and once he had maced a woman up-river in a shantyboat drinking bout—Tedge had got away both times. Now and then, boasting about the shrimp camps, he hinted mysteriously at his two killings, and showed his freckled, hairy right hand.

"If they find anything of him—he got hurt in the wreck," the master grinned. He couldn't see the body, for a black longhorn had fallen upon his victim, it appeared. Anyhow, the cattle were milling desperately around in the pen; the stranger who said his name was Milt Rogers would be a lacerated lump of flesh in that mad stampede long ere the fire reached him. Tedge got his tin document box and went aft.

Crump and Hogjaw were already in the flat-bottomed bayou skiff, holding it off the *Marie Louise's* port runway, and the master stepped into it. The heat was singeing their faces by now.

"Pull off," grunted the skipper, "around east'ard. This bar sticks clean out o' water off there, and you lay around it, Hogjaw. They won't be no sea 'til the breeze lifts at sunup."

The big black heaved on the short oars. The skiff was a hundred yards out on the glassy sea when Crump spoke cunningly, "I knowed something——"

"Yeh?" Tedge turned from his bow seat to look past the oarsman's head at the engineman. "Yeh knowed——"

"This Rogers, he was tryin' to get off the burnin' wreck and he fell, somehow or——"

"The oil tank blew, and a piece o' pipe took him," grunted Tedge. "I tried to drag him out o' the fire—Gawd knows I did, didn't I, Crump?"

Crump nodded scaredly. The black oarsman's eyes narrowed and he crouched dumbly as he rowed. Tedge was behind him—Tedge of the *Marie Louise* who could kill with his fists. No, Hogjaw knew nothing—he never would know anything.



"I jest took him on out o' kindness," mumbled Tedge. "I got no license fer passenger business. Jest a bum I took on to go and see his swamp girl up Des Amoureux. Well, it ain't no use sayin' anything, is it now?"

A mile away the wreck of the *Marie Louise* appeared as a yellow-red rent in the curtain of night. Red, too, was the flat, calm sea, save northerly where a sand ridge gleamed. Tedge turned to search for its outlying point. There was a pass here beyond which the reefs began once more and stretched on, a barrier to the shoal inside waters. When the skiff had drawn about the sand spit, the reflecting waters around the *Marie* had vanished, and the fire appeared as a fallen meteor burning on the flat, black belt of encircling reef.

Tedge's murderous little eyes watched easterly. They must find the other side of the tidal pass and go up it to strike off for the distant shrimp camps with their story of the end of the *Marie Louise*—boat and cargo a total loss on Au Fer sands.

Upon the utter sea silence there came a sound—a faint bawling of dying cattle, of trampled, choked cattle in the fume and flames. It was very far off now; and to-morrow's tide and wind would find nothing but a blackened timber, a swollen, floating carcass or two—nothing more.

But the black man could see the funeral pyre; the distant glare of it was showing the whites of his eyes faintly to the master, when suddenly he stopped rowing. A drag, the soft sibilance of a moving thing, was on his oar blade. He jerked it free, staring.

"Lilies, boss—makin' out dis pass, too, lilies——"

"I see 'em—drop below 'em!" Tedge felt the glow of an unappeasable anger mount to his temples. "Damn 'em—I see 'em!"

They they were, upright, tranquil, immense hyacinths—their spear-points three feet above the water, their feathery streamers drifting six feet below; the broad, waxy leaves floating above their bulbous surface mats—they came on silently under the stars; they vanished under the stars seaward to their death.

"Yeh!" roared Tedge. "Sun and sea to-morry—they'll be back on Au Fer like dried bones o' dead men in the sand! Bear east'ard off of 'em!"

The oarsman struggled in the deeper pass water. The skiff bow suddenly plunged into a wall of green-and-purple bloom. The points brushed Tedge's cheek. He cursed and smote them, tore them from the low bow and flung them. But the engineman stood up and peered into the starlight.

"Yeh 'll not make it. Better keep up the port shore. I cain't see nothin' but lilies east'ard—worlds o' flowers comin' with the *crevasse* water behind 'em." He dipped a finger to the water, tasted of it, and grumbled on: "It ain't hardly salt, the big rivers are pourin' such a flood out o' the swamps. Worlds o' flowers comin' out the passes——"

"Damn the flowers!" Tedge arose, shaking his fist at them. "Back out o' 'em! Pull up the Au Fer side, and we'll break through 'em in the bay!"

Against the ebb tide close along Au Fer reef, the oarsman toiled until Crump, the lookout, grumbled again.

"The shoal's blocked wi' 'em! They're stranded on the ebb. Tedge, yeh'll have to wait for more water to pass this bar inside 'em. Yeh try to cross the pass, and the lilies 'll have us all to sea in this crazy skiff when the wind lifts wi' the sun."

"I'm clean wore out," the black man muttered. "Yeh can wait fer day and tide on the sand, boss."

"Well, drive her in, then!" raged the skipper. "The in-tide'll set before daylight. We'll take it up the bay."

He rolled over the bow, knee-deep in the warm inlet water, and dragged the skiff through the shoals. Crump jammed an oar in the sand; and warping the headline to this, the three trudged on to the white dry ridge. Tedge flung himself by the first stubby grass clump.

"Clean beat," he muttered. "By day we'll pass 'em. Damn 'em—and I'll see 'em dyin' in the sun—lilies like dried, dead weeds on the sand—that's what they'll be in a couple o' days—he said they was pretty, that fello' back there——" Lying with his head on his arm, he lifted a thumb to point over his shoulder. He couldn't see the distant blotch of fire against the low stars—he didn't want to. He couldn't mark the silent drift of the sea gardens in the pass, but he gloated in the thought that they were riding to their death. The pitiless sun, the salt tides drunk up to their spongy bulbs, and their glory passed—they would be matted refuse on the shores and

a man could trample them. Yes, the sea was with Tedge, and the rivers, too; the flood waters were lifting the lilies from their immemorable strongholds and forcing them out to their last pageant of death.

The three castaways slept in the warm sand. It was an hour later that some other living thing stirred at the far end of Au Fer reef. A scorched and weakened steer came on through salt pools to stagger and fall. Presently another, and then a slow line of them. They crossed the higher ridge to huddle about a sink that might have made them remember the dry drinking holes of their arid home plains. Tired, gaunt cattle mooing lonesomely, when the man came about them to dig with his bloody fingers in the sand.

He tried another place, and another—he didn't know—he was a man of the short-grass country, not a coaster; perhaps a sandy sink might mean fresh water. But after each effort the damp feeling on his hands was from his gashed and battered head and not life-giving water. He wiped the blood from his eyes and stood up in the starlight.

"Twenty-one of 'em—alive—and me," he muttered. "I got 'em off—they trampled me and beat me down, but I got their pens open. Twenty-one livin'—and me on the sands!"

He wondered stupidly how he had done it. The stern of the *Marie Louise* had burned off and sogged down in deep water, but her bow hung to the reef, and in smoke and flame he had fought the cattle over it. They clustered now in the false water-hole, silent, listless, as if they knew the uselessness of the urge of life on Au Fer reef.

And after a while the man went on eastward. Where and how far the sand ridge stretched he did not know. Vaguely he knew of the tides and sun to-morrow. From the highest point he looked back. The wreck was a dull red glow, the stars above it cleared now of smoke. The sea, too, seemed to have gone back to its infinite peace, as if it had washed itself daintily after this greasy morsel it must hide in its depths.

A half hour the man walked wearily, and then before him stretched water again. He turned up past the tide flowing down the pass—perhaps that was all of Au Fer. A narrow spit of white sand at high tide, and even over that, the sea breeze freshening, the surf would curl?

"Ships never come in close, they said," he mused tiredly, "and miles o' shoals to the land—and then just swamp for miles. Dumb brutes o' cows, and me on this—and no water nor feed, nor shade from the sun."

He stumbled on through the shallows, noticing apathetically that the water was running here. Nearly to his waist he waded, peering into the starlight. He was a cowman and he couldn't swim; he had never seen anything but the dry ranges until he said he would go find the girl he had met once on the upper Brazos—a girl who told him of sea and sunken forests, of islands of flowers drifting in lonely swamp lakes—he had wanted to see that land, but mostly the Cajan girl of Bayou Des Amoureux.

He wouldn't see her now; he would die among dying cattle, but maybe it was fit for a cattleman to go that way—a Texas man and Texas cows.

Then he saw a moving thing. It rode out of the dark and brushed him. It touched him with soft fingers and he drew them to him. A water hyacinth, and its purple spike topped his head as he stood waist-deep. So cool its leaves, and the dripping bulbs that he pressed them to his bloody cheek. He sank his teeth into them for that coolness on his parched tongue. The spongy bulb was sweet; it exhaled odorous moisture. He seized it ravenously. It carried sweet water, redolent of green forest swamps!

He dragged at another floating lily, sought under the leaves for the buoyant bulb. A drop or two of the fresh water a man could press from each!

Like a starving animal he moved in the shoals, seeing more drifting garden clumps. And then a dark object that did not drift. He felt for it slowly, and then straightened up, staring about.

A flat-bottomed bayou skiff, and in it the oars, a riverman's blanket-roll of greasy clothes, and a tin box! He knew the box. On one end, in faded gilt, was the name "B. Tedge." Rogers had seen it on the grimy shelf in the pilothouse on the *Marie Louise*. He felt for the rope; the skiff was barely scraping bottom. Yes, they had moored it here—they must be camped on the sands of Au Fer, awaiting the dawn.

A boat? He didn't know what a Texas cowman could do with a boat on an alien and unknown shore, but he slipped

into it, raised an oar, and shoved back from the sandy spit. At least he could drift off Au Fer's waterless desolation. Tedge would kill him to-morrow when he found him there; because he knew Tedge had fired the *Marie* for the insurance.

So he poled slowly off. The skiff drifted now. Rogers tried to turn to the oar athwart, and awkwardly he stumbled. The oar seemed like a roll of thunder when it struck the gunwale.

And instantly a hoarse shout arose behind him. Tedge's voice—Tedge had not slept well. The gaunt cattle burning or choking in the salt tide, or perhaps the lilies of Bayou Bœuf—anyhow, he was up with a cry and dashing for the skiff. In a moment Rogers saw him.

The Texas man began driving desperately on the oars. He heard the heavy rush of the skipper's feet in the deepening water. Tedge's voice became a bull-like roar as the depth began to check him. To his waist, and the slow skiff was but ten yards away; to his great shoulders, and the clumsy oarsman was but five.

And with a yell of triumph Tedge lunged out swimming. Whoever the fugitive, he was hopeless with the oars. The skiff swung this way and that, and a strong man at its stern could hurl it and its occupant bottom-side up in Au Fer Pass. Tedge, swimming in Au Fer Pass, his fingers to the throat of this unknown marauder! There'd be another one go—and nothing but his hands—Bill Tedge's hands that the shrimp camps feared.

Just hold him under—that was all. Tread water, and hold the throat beneath until its throbbing ceased. Tedge could; he feared no man. Another overhand stroke, and he just missed the wobbling stern of the light skiff.

He saw the man start up and raise an oar as if to strike. Tedge laughed triumphantly. Another plunge and his fingers touched the gunwale. And then he dived; he would bring his back up against the flat bottom and twist his enemy's footing from under him. Then in the deep water Tedge lunged up for the flat keel, and slowly across his brow an invisible hand seemed to caress him.

He opened his eyes to see a necklace of opalescent jewels gathering about his neck; he tore at it and the phosphorescent water gleamed all about him with feathery pendants. And

when his head thrust above water, the moment's respite had allowed the skiff to straggle beyond his reach.

Tedge shouted savagely and lunged again—and about his legs came the soft clasp of the drifting hyacinth roots. Higher, firmer; and he turned to kick free of them. He saw the man in the boat poling uncertainly in the tide not six feet beyond him. And now, in open water, Tedge plunged on in fierce exultance. One stroke—and the stars beyond the boatman became obscured; the swimmer struck the soft, yielding barrier of the floating islands. This time he did not lose time in drawing from them; he raised his mighty arms and strove to beat them down, flailing the broad leaves until the spiked blossoms fell about him. A circlet of them caressed his cheek. He lowered his head and swam bull-like into the drift; and when he knew the pressure ahead was tightening slowly to rubbery bands, forcing him gently from his victim, Tedge raised his voice in wild curses.

He fought and threshed the lilies, and they gave him cool, velvety kisses in return. He dived and came up through them; and then, staring upward, he saw the tall, purple spikes against the stars. And they were drifting—they were sailing seaward to their death. He couldn't see the boat now for the shadowy hosts; and for the first time fear glutted his heart. It came as a paroxysm of new sensation—Tedge of the *Marie Louise* who had never feared.

But this was different, this soft and moving web of silence. No, not quite silence, for past his ear the splendid hyacinths drifted with a musical creaking, leaf on leaf, the buoyant bulbs brushing each other. The islets joined and parted; once he saw open water and plunged for it—and over his shoulders there surged a soft coverlet. He turned and beat it; he churned his bed into a furious welter, and the silken curtain lowered.

He shrank from it now, staring. The feathery roots matted across his chest, the mass of them felt slimy like the hide of a drowned brute.

"Drownin' cows"—he muttered thickly—"comin' on a man driftin' and drownin'—no, no! Lilies, jest lilies—damn 'em!"

The tall spiked flowers seemed nodding—yes, just lilies, drifting and singing elfin music to the sea tide. Tedge roared

once again his hatred of them; he raised and battered his huge fists into their beauty, and they seemed to smile in the starlight. Then, with a howl, he dived.

He would beat them—deep water was here in the pass, and he would swim mightily far beneath the trailing roots—he would find the man with the boat yet and hurl him to die in the hyacinth bloom.

He opened his eyes in the deep, clear water and exulted. He, Tedge, had outwitted the bannered argosies. With bursting lungs he charged off across the current, thinking swiftly, coolly, now of the escape. And as he neared the surface he twisted to glance upward. It was light there—a light brighter than the stars, but softer, evanescent. Mullet and squib were darting about or clinging to a feathery forest that hung straight down upon him. Far and near there came little darts of pale fire, gleaming and expiring with each stir in the phosphorescent water.

And he had to rise; a man could not hold the torturing air in his lungs for ever. Yes, he would tear a path to the stars again and breathe. His arms flailed into the first tenuous streamers, which parted in pearly lace before his eyes. He breasted higher, and they were all about him now; his struggles evoked glowing bubble-jewels which drifted upward to expire. He grasped the soft roots and twisted and sought to raise himself. He had a hand to the surface bulbs, but a silken mesh seemed tightening about him.

And it was drifting—everything was drifting in the deep pass of Au Fer. He tried to howl in the hyacinth web, and choked—and then he merely fought in his close-pressing cocoon, thrusting one hard fist to grasp the broad leaves. He clung to them dumbly, his face so close to the surface that the tall spiked flowers smiled down—but they drifted inexorably with a faint, creaking music, leaf on leaf.

Tedge opened his eyes to a flicker of myriad lights. The sound was a roaring now—like the surf on the reefs in the hurricane month; or the thunder of maddened steers above him across this flowery sea meadow. Perhaps the man he had killed rode with this stampede? Tedge shrank under the lilies—perhaps they could protect him now? Even the last stroke of his hands made luminous beauty of the under-running tide.

An outward-bound shrimp lugger saw the figures on Au Fer reef and came to anchor beyond the shoals. The Cajan crew rowed up to where Milt Rogers and Crump and the black deckhand were watching by a pool. The shrimpers listened to the cowman, who had tied the sleeve of his shirt about his bloody head.

"You can get a barge down from Morgan City and take the cows off before the sea comes high," said Rogers quietly. "They're eating the lilies—and they find sweet water in 'em. Worlds o' lilies driftin' to sea with sweet water in the bulbs!" And he added, watching Crump and the black man who seemed in terror of him: "I want to get off, too. I want to see the swamp country where worlds o' flowers come from!"

He said no more. He did not even look in the pool where Crump pointed. He was thinking of that girl of the swamps who had bid him come to her. But all along the white surf line he could see the green-and-purple plumes of the hyacinth warriors tossing in the breeze—legion upon legion, coming to die gloriously on Au Fer's sands.

But first they sent a herald; for in Tedge's hand, as he lay in the pool, one waxen-leafed banner with a purple spear-point glittered in the sun.



# THE URGE

By MARYLAND ALLEN

From *Everybody's*

SHE is now a woman ageless because she is famous. She is surrounded by a swarm of lovers and possesses a great many beautiful things. She has more than one Ming jar in the library at her country place; yards upon yards of point de Venise in her top bureau-drawer. She is able to employ a very pleasant, wholesome woman, whose sole duty it is to keep her clothes in order.

She wears superb clothes—the last word in richness and the elegance of perfection—clothes that no man can declaim over, stimulating himself the while with shot after shot of that most insidious of all dope, self-pity. You see, she earns them all herself, along with the Ming jars, the point de Venise, the country place, and countless other things. She is the funniest woman in the world—not in her press-agent's imagination, but in cold, sober fact. She can make anybody laugh; she does make everybody.

Night after night in the huge public theatres of the common people; in the small private ones of the commoner rich; in Greek amphitheatres where the laughter rolls away in thunderous waves to be echoed back by distant blue hills; in institutions for the blind; in convalescent wards; everywhere, every time, she makes them laugh. The day labourer, sodden and desperate from too much class legislation, the ego in his cosmos and the struggle for existence; the statesman, fearful of losing votes, rendered blue and depressed by the unruliness of nations and all the vast multitude of horrors that lie in between—all of these, all of them, she makes laugh. She is queen of the profession she has chosen—unusual for one of her sex. She is the funniest woman in the world.

When she is at home—which is seldom—she has many visitors and strives, if possible, to see none of them.

"You know, I entertain so much," she pleads in that vivid, whimsical way of hers that holds as much of sadness as mirth.

But this time, it being so early in the afternoon, she was caught unawares.

The girls—they were nothing but girls, three of them—found her out upon the lawn, sitting on a seat where the velvety green turf fell away in a steep hillside, and far beneath them they could see the river moving whitely beyond the trees. They halted there before her, happy but trembling, giggling but grave. They were gasping and incoherent, full of apologies and absurd tremors. It had taken their combined week's savings to bribe the gardener. And they only wanted to know one thing: How had she achieved all this fame and splendour, by what magic process had she become that rarest of all living creatures, the funniest woman in the world?

It was an easy enough question to ask and, to them, hovering twittering upon high heels a trifle worn to one side, a simple one for her to answer. She looked at them in that humorous, kindly way of hers, looked at their silly, excited, made-up faces with noses sticking out stark, like handles, from a too-heavy application of purplish-white powder. Then her glance travelled down the velvety green slope to the bright river glancing and leaping beyond the shady trees.

Did she think of that other girl? Sitting there with that strange smile upon her face, the smile that is neither mirth nor sadness, but a poignant, haunting compound of both, did she remember her and the Urge that had always been upon her, racking her like actual pain, driving her with a whip of scorpions, flaying her on and on with a far more vivid sense of suffering than the actual beatings laid on by her mother's heavy hand, the thing that found articulation in the words, "I must be famous, I must!"

She belonged in the rear of a batch of a dozen, and had never been properly named. The wind was blowing from the stockyards on the dark hour when she arrived. It penetrated even to the small airless chamber where she struggled for her first breath—one of a "flat" in the poorest tenement in the

worst slum in Chicago. Huddled in smelly rags by a hastily summoned neighbour from the floor above, the newcomer raised her untried voice in a frail, reedy cry. Perhaps she did not like the smell that oozed in around the tightly closed window to combat the foul odours of the airless room. Whatever it was, this protest availed her nothing, for the neighbour hurriedly departed, having been unwilling from the first, and the mother turned away and lay close against the stained, discoloured wall, too apathetic, too utterly resigned to the fate life had meted out to her to accord this most unwelcome baby further attention. This first moment of her life might easily serve as the history of her babyhood.

Her father was also indifferent. He brought home his money and gave it to his wife—children were strictly none of his business. Her brothers and sisters, each one busily and fiercely fending for himself, gave no attention to her small affairs.

Tossed by the careless hand of Fate into the dark sea of life to swim or perish, she awoke to consciousness with but one thought—food; one ruling passion—to get enough. And since, in her habitual half-starved state, all food looked superlatively good to her, cake was the first word she learned to speak. It formed her whole vocabulary for a surprisingly long time, and Cake was the only name she was ever known by in her family circle and on the street that to her ran on and on and on as narrow and dirty, as crowded and as cruel as where it passed the great dilapidated old rookery that held the four dark rooms that she called home.

Up to the age of ten her life was sketchy. A passionate scramble for food, beatings, tears, slumber, a swift transition from one childish ailment to another that kept her forever out of reach of the truant officer.

She lay upon the floor in a little dark room, and through the window in the airless air-shaft, high up in one corner, she could see a three-cornered spot of light. At first she wondered what it was, since she lived in a tenement, not under the sky. Then it resolved itself into a ball, white and luminous, that floated remote in that high place and seemed to draw her, and was somehow akin to the queer, gnawing pain that developed about that time beneath her breastbone. It was all inarticulate, queer and confused. She did not think, she

did not know how. She only felt that queer gnawing beneath her breastbone, distinct from all her other pains, and which she ascribed to hunger, and saw the lovely, trembling globe of light. At first she felt it only when she was ill and lay on the tumbled floor bed and looked up through the dark window; afterward always in her dreams.

After she passed her tenth birthday the confusion within her seemed to settle as the queer pain increased, and she began to think, to wonder what it could be.

A year or two later her father died, and as she was the only child over whom her mother could exercise any control, the report of her death was successfully impressed upon the truant officer, so that she might be put to work unhindered to help the family in its desperate scramble for food, a scramble in which she took part with vivid earnestness. She was hired to Maverick's to wash dishes.

Maverick was a Greek and kept an open-all-night chop-house, a mean hole in the wall two doors from the corner, where Cake's surpassing thinness made her invaluable at the sink. Also the scraps she carried home in her red, water-puckered hands helped out materially. Then her mother took a boarder and rested in her endeavours, feeling she had performed all things well.

This boarder was a man with a past. And he had left it pretty far behind, else he had never rented a room and meals from the mother of Cake. In this boarder drink and debauchery had completely beaten out of shape what had once been a very noble figure of a man. His body was shrunken and trembling; the old, ragged clothes he wore flapped about him like the vestments of a scarecrow. His cheeks had the bruised congested look of the habitual drinker, his nose seemed a toadstool on his face, and his red eyes were almost vanished behind puffy, purple, pillow-like lids. His voice was husky and whispering, except when he raised it. Then it was surprisingly resonant and mellow, with something haunting in it like the echo of an echo of a very moving sweetness.

One night Cake, returning all weary and played-out from dish-washing at Maverick's, heard him speaking in this loud voice of his, pushed the door open a crack, and peeked in. He was standing in the middle of the floor evidently speaking what the child called to herself "a piece." Her big mouth

crooked derisively in the beginning of what is now her famous smile. The lodger went on speaking, being fairly well stimulated at the time, and presently Cake pushed the door wider and crept in to the dry-goods box, where her mother always kept a candle, and sat down.

The lodger talked on and on while Cake sat rapt, the flickering candle in her hands throwing strange lights and shadows upon her gaunt face. How was she to know she was the last audience of one of the greatest Shakespearian actors the world had ever seen?

It was a grave and wondering Cake that crept to her place to sleep that night between her two older sisters. And while they ramped against her and chewed and snorted in her ears, she listened all over again to that wonderful voice and was awed by the colour and beauty of the words that it had spoken. She slept, and saw before her the globe of light, trembling and luminous, the one bright thing of beauty her life had ever known, that seemed to draw her up from darkness slowly and with great suffering. Trembling and weeping she awoke in the dawn, and the strange pain that had tortured her so much and that she had called hunger and sought to assuage with scraps from the plates that came to the sink at Maverick's became articulate at last. With her hands clasped hard against her breast she found relief in words.

"I gotta be somebody," sobbed the child. "I mus' be famous, I mus'!"

She arose to find life no longer a confused struggle for food, but a battle and a march; a battle to get through one day to march on to the next, and so on and on until, in that long line of days that stretched out ahead of her like chambers waiting to be visited, she reached the one where rested Fame, that trembling, luminous globe of beauty it was so vitally necessary for her to achieve. "How come he c'n talk like that?" she demanded of herself, musing on the lodger's wonderful exhibition over the greasy dish-water at Maverick's.

And that night she asked him, prefacing her question with the offering of an almost perfect lamb-chop. Only one piece had been cut from it since the purchaser, at that moment apprised by Maverick himself that the arrival of the police was imminent, had taken a hasty departure.

"Who learned you to talk that-a-way?" demanded Cake,

licking a faint, far-away flavour of the chop from her long, thin fingers.

The lodger, for a moment, had changed places with the candle. That is to say, he sat upon the dry-goods box, the candle burned upon the floor. And, having been most unfortunate that day, the lodger was tragically sober. He bit into the chop voraciously, like a dog, with his broken, discoloured teeth.

"A book 'learned' me," he said, "and practice and experience—and something else." He broke off short. "They called it genius then," he said bitterly.

Cake took a short step forward. That thing beneath her prominent breastbone pained her violently, forced her on to speak.

"You learn me," she said.

The lodger ceased to chew and stared, the chop bone uplifted in his dirty hand. A pupil for him!

"You want to do this perhaps," he began. "Pray do not mock me; I am a very foolish, fond old man——"

The disreputable, swollen-faced lodger with a nose like a poisoned toadstool vanished. Cake saw an old white-haired man, crazy and pitiful, yet bearing himself grandly. She gasped, the tears flew to her eyes, blinding her. The lodger laughed disagreeably, he was gnawing on the chop bone again.

"I suppose you think because you've found me here it is likely I'll teach you—you! You starved alley cat!" he snarled.

Cake did not even blink. It is repetition that dulls, and she was utterly familiar with abuse.

"And suppose I did—'learn' you," he sneered, "what would you do with it?"

"I would be famous," cried Cake.

Then the lodger did laugh, looking at her with his head hanging down, his swollen face all creased and purple, his hair sticking up rough and unkempt. He laughed, sitting there a degraded, debauched ruin, looking down from the height of his memories upon the gaunt, unlovely child of the slums who was rendered even more unlovely by the very courage that kept her waiting beside the broken door.

"So you think I could learn you to be famous, hey?" Even

the words of this gutter filth he sought to construe into something flattering to himself.

Cake nodded. Really she had not thought of it that way at all. There was no thinking connected with her decision. The dumb hours she had spent staring up the air-shaft had resolved themselves with the passing years into a strange, numb will to do. There was the light and she must reach it. Indeed the Thing there behind the narrow walls of her chest gave her no alternative. She did not think she wanted to be an actress. It was a long time after that before she knew even what an actress was. She did not know what the lodger had been. No. Instinctively, groping and inarticulate, she recognized in him the rags and shreds of greatness, knew him to be a one-time dweller in that temple whither, willing or not, she was bound, to reach it or to die.

The lodger looked down at the naked chop bone in his hand. The juicy, broiled meat was comforting to his outraged stomach. Meat. The word stood out in his mind to be instantly followed by that other word that, for him, had spelled ruin, made him a ragged panhandler, reduced him to living among the poorest and most hopeless. Drink! He raised his head and eyed Cake with crafty calculation.

"What will you pay me for such teaching?" he demanded, and looked down again at the bone.

What he did in the end, Cake herself was satisfied came to him afterward. At first he was actuated only by the desire to procure food and drink—more especially the drink—at the cost of the least possible effort to himself.

Cake saw the look, and she knew. She even smiled a little in the greatness of her relief. She saw she had been right to bring the chop, and appreciated that her progress along road to fame would be as slow or fast as she could procure food for him in lesser or larger quantities.

"I'll bring you eats," she said cunningly. "From Mave-rick's," she added. By which she meant the eats would be "has-beens"—distinctly second class, quite possibly third.

The lodger nodded. "And booze," he put in, watching her face.

"And booze," Cake assented.

So the bargain was struck in a way that worked the most cruel hardship on the girl. Food she could steal and did,

blithely enough, since she had no monitor but the lure of brightness and that Thing within her breast that hotly justified the theft and only urged her on. But booze was a very different proposition. It was impossible to steal booze—even a little. To secure booze she was forced to offer money. Now what money Cake earned at Maverick's her mother snatched from her hand before she was well within the door. If she held out even a dime, she got a beating. And Cake's mother, in the later years of her life, besides being a clever evader of the police and the truant officer, developed into a beater of parts. Broken food the child offered in abundance and piteous hope. But the lodger was brutally indifferent.

"Food," he scoffed. "Why, it says in the Bible—you never heard of the Bible, hey?" Cake shook her tangled head.

"No? Well, it's quite a Book," commented the lodger. He had been fortunate that day and was, for him, fairly intoxicated. "And it says right in there—and some consider that Book an authority—man cannot live by food alone. Drink—I drink when I have occasion, and sometimes when I have no occasion—— Don't you know what drink is, alley-cat? Very well, then, wine is wont to show the mind of man, and you won't see mine until you bring me booze. Get out!"

And Cake got out. Also, being well versed in a very horrid wisdom, she took the food with her. This was hardly what the lodger had expected, and I think what respect he was capable of sprouted for her then.

Behind a screen of barrels in the corner of the alley Cake ate the broken meats herself, taking what comfort she could, and pondering the while the awful problem of securing the booze, since she must be taught, and since the lodger moved in her sphere as the only available teacher.

There was a rush up the alleypast her hiding-place, a shout, and the savage thud of blows. Very cautiously, as became one wise in the ways of life in that place, Cake peered around a barrel. She saw Red Dan, who sold papers in front of Jere Dooley's place, thoroughly punishing another and much larger boy. The bigger boy was crying.

"Anybody c'n sell pi'pers," shouted Red Dan, pounding the information home bloodily. "You hear me?—anybody!"

Cake crept out of her hiding-place on the opposite side.



She did not care what happened to the bigger boy, though she respected Red Dan the more. She knew where the money was going to come from to buy the lodger's booze. It meant longer hours for her; it meant care to work only out of school hours; it meant harder knocks than even she had experienced; it meant a fatigue there were no words to describe even among the beautiful, wonderful, colourful ones the lodger taught her. But she sold the papers and she purchased the booze.

Her mother did not know where she spent this extra time. She did not care since the money came in from Maverick's steadily each week. Neither did the lodger care how the booze was procured; the big thing to him was that it came.

At first these lessons were fun for him; the big, gawky, half-starved, overworked child seeing so vividly in pictures all that he told her in words. Full-fed on the scraps from Maverick's—he was no longer fastidious—well stimulated by the drink she brought, he took an ugly sort of degraded pleasure in posturing before her, acting as he alone could act those most wonderful of all plays, watching with hateful, sardonic amusement the light and shadow of emotion upon her dirty face. Oh, he was a magician, no doubt at all of that! Past master in the rare art of a true genius, that of producing illusion.

Then he would make Cake try, rave at her, curse her, strike her, kill himself laughing, drink some more and put her at it again.

Night after night, almost comatose from the fatigue of a day that began while it was still dark, she carried a heaped-up plate and a full bottle to the lodger's room and sat down upon the dry-goods box with the candle beside her on the floor. And, having thus secured her welcome, night after night she walked with him among that greatest of all throngs of soldiers and lovers, kings and cardinals, queens, prostitutes and thieves.

If the liquor was short in the bottle a dime's worth, the lesson was curtailed. At first Cake tried to coax him. "Aw, c'mon, yuh Romeo on th' street in Mantua."

But the lodger was never so drunk that he made the slightest concession.

"Yes, I'm Romeo all right—the lad's there, never fear, gutter-snipe. But—the bottle is not full."

After that she never attempted to change his ruling. She

was letter perfect in the bitter lesson, and if the sale of papers did not bring in enough to fill the bottle, she accepted the hard fact with the calm of great determination and did not go near the lodger's room, but went to bed instead.

Perhaps it was these rare occasions of rest that kept her alive.

After the lodger had been teaching her for several years her mother died and was buried in the potters' field. Cake managed to keep two rooms of the wretched flat, and no word of his landlady's demise reached the lodger's drink-dulled ears. Otherwise Cake feared he might depart, taking with him her one big chance to reach the light. You see, she did not know the lodger. Things might have been different if she had. But he was never a human being to her, even after she knew the truth; only a symbol, a means to the great end.

Her brothers went away—to the penitentiary and other places. One by one the flood of life caught her sisters and swept them out, she did not know to what. She never even wondered. She had not been taught to care. She had never been taught anything. The knowledge that she must be famous danced through her dreams like a will-o'-the-wisp; had grown within her in the shape of a great pain that never ceased; only eased a little as she strove mightily toward the goal.

So she still sold papers, a homely, gawky, long-legged girl in ragged clothes much too small for her, and slaved at Maverick's for the lodger's nightly dole that he might teach her and she be famous.

At first he was keen on the meat and drink—more especially the drink. Later, gradually, a change came over him. Only Cake did not notice this change. She was too set on being taught so she could become famous. At first the lodger was all oaths and blows with shouts of fierce, derisive laughter intermingled.

"My God!" he would cry. "If Noyes could only see this—if he only could!"

This Noyes, it appeared, was a man he furiously despised. When he was in the third stage of drunkenness he would never teach Cake, but would only abuse his enemies, and this Noyes invariably came in for a fearful shower of epithets. It was he as Cake heard it, sitting huddled on the old dry-goods box,

the candle casting strange shadows into her gaunt, unchild-like face, who was the cause of the lodger's downfall. But for Noyes—with a blasting array of curses before the name—he would now have what Cake so ardently strove for: Fame. But for Noyes he would be acting in his own theatre, riding in his own limousine, wearing his own diamonds, entertaining his own friends upon his own gold plate.

When he was still too sober to take a really vital interest in the teaching, he was a misanthrope, bitter and brutal, with an astonishing command of the most terrible words. At these times he made the gravest charges against Noyes; charges for which the man should be made accountable, even to such a one as the lodger. One evening Cake sat watching him, waiting for this mood to pass so that the teaching might begin.

"If I was youse," she said at last, "and hated a guy like youse do this Noyes, I'd fetch 'im a insult that'd get under his skin right. I'd make evens wit' 'im, I would, not jes' talk about it."

"Oh, you would!" remarked the lodger. He took a long pull at the bottle. "You be *Queen Kathrine*, you alley-cat."

So the nightly teaching began with the usual accompaniment of curses, blows, and shouts of brutal laughter. But when it was over and the lodger was sinking to the third stage that came inevitably with the bottom of the bottle, he kept looking at his pupil queerly.

"Oh, you would! Oh, you would, would you?" He said it over and over again. "Oh, you would, would you?"

And after that he was changed by the leaven of hate her suggestion had started working in him. For one thing, he took a far greater interest in the teaching for its own sake. Of that much the girl herself was thankfully aware. And she thought, Cake did, that the dull husk of self was wearing away from that part of her destined to be famous, wearing away at last. The lodger's curses changed in tone as the nights filed past, the blows diminished, the laughter became far more frequent.

Cake, as rapidly reaching the end of her girlhood as the lodger was nearing the limits of his drink-sapped strength, redoubled her efforts. It was very plain to her that he could not live much longer; death in delirium tremens was inevit-

able. After that, she decided, school would not keep, and she must try her fortune.

Then one night in the midst of the potion scene when she felt herself *Juliet*, soft, passionate, and beautiful, far away in the land of tragic romance, she heard the lodger crying:

"Stop—my God, stop! How do you get that way? Don't you know there's a limit to human endurance, alley-cat?"

He was fairly toppling from the dry-goods box. His eyes were popping from his head, and in the flickering candlelight his face looked strained and queer. In after life she became very familiar with that expression; she saw it on all types of faces. In fact, she came to expect to see it there. But she did not know how to analyze it then. She glimpsed it only as a tribute to her performance, so immense that she had to be halted in the middle, and felt correspondingly elated. She was exactly right in her deduction. But Cake and the lodger advanced along very different lines of thought.

The next night he was shaky, came all too quickly to the teaching period, and left it as speedily. Then he retired to the flock mattress in the corner of the room and called Cake to bring the candle.

"I've an idea I'm going to leave you, gutter-snipe," he said, "and I doubt if I ever see you again. The end of life cancels all bands. And the one that bound you to me, alley-cat, was very material, very material indeed. The kind that runs easily in and out of a black bottle." He laughed

"You Shakespearian actress!" He laughed again, longer this time. "But I have not forgotten you," he resumed. "In addition to all that I have taught you, I am going to leave you something. Here," he fumbled out a square envelope and Cake took it between her hands. "Take that to the address written on it," said the lodger, "and see what the gentleman does." He began to laugh again.

"Noyes——" he cried and broke off to curse feebly but volubly. Cake did not even glance in his direction. She went away out of the room, too utterly stunned with fatigue to look at the letter in her dingy hand.

The next morning the lodger was dead. He was buried in the potters' field quite near his old landlady.

This second funeral, such as it was, closed the shelter that

Cake, for want of a more fitting name, had called home. She decided to put all her years of bitterly acquired learning to the test. And as she best knew what she had bought and paid for it, she felt she could not fail. She unfolded from a scrap of newspaper the envelope presented her by the lodger and carefully studied the address.

Cake could both read and write, having acquired these arts from a waiter at Maverick's, who also helped her steal the broken meats with which she secured her artistic education. And, watching the steady disappearance of the food, this waiter marvelled that she got no fatter as she grew upward, hovering about in hope of becoming her lover if she ever did. But even if that miracle had ever been accomplished the helpful waiter would still have waited. Cake's conception of a real lady was *Queen Katherine; Cleopatra* her dream of a dangerous, fascinating one. And what chance in the world for either with a waiter?

Cake read the name and address upon the envelope freely as the hopeful bread-caster had taught her: Arthur Payson Noyes, National Theatre. With the simplicity and dispatch that characterized her, she went to that place. To the man reposing somnolently in the broken old chair beside the door she said she had a letter for Mr. Noyes. The doorkeeper saw it was a large, swanking envelope with very polite writing. He straightened up in the chair long enough to pass her in, and then slumped down again.

Cake found herself in a queer, barnlike place, half room and half hallway, feebly illumined by a single electric bulb suspended above the door. Very composedly she looked about her. If Mr. Arthur Noyes lived in this place, he was one of her own kind and there was no need for any palpitation on her part. Anyway, she was looking solely for her chance to become famous, and she brought to this second stage of her search the same indifference to externals, the same calm, unfaltering courage as she had to the first.

"Now, then," said a voice briskly. "Say what you want. We have not advertised for any extra people. At least—not this year."

A short, stout man emerged from the shadows. He was very blond, with his hair cut snapper, and his pale eyes popped perpetual astonishment. She returned his look steadily and

well. She knew she was born to be famous, and fame has a certain beauty of dignity utterly lacking in mere success.

"I am not an extra person," she replied. "I have come to see Mr. Noyes," and she displayed once more the large square envelope, her legacy from the lodger, the knife with which she proposed to shuck from its rough shell that oyster, the world.

The man looked even more astonished, if the thing could have been accomplished, and regarded her keenly—stared.

"Come this way," he said.

Cake followed him along a narrow passage that turned off to the right, down five steps, across a narrow entry, up three more steps—although it seems quite silly, she never in her life forgot the odd number of those worn steps—and halted before a closed door. On this the fat man knocked once and opened immediately without waiting.

"Someone I think you'll see," he said, standing between Cake and the interior. There came to her a murmur over his chunky shoulder.

"She has a letter from——" The fat man dropped his voice and mumbled. "Positive," he said, aloud, after a pause broken only by the vague murmur within the room. "I'd know his fist anywhere. Yes." Then he pushed the door open wide, stood aside, and looked at Cake. "Walk in," he said.

She did so. Beautifully. Poems have been written about her walk. Two kinds.

The room she entered was square, with concrete floor and rough walls. But Cake did not notice the room for three reasons: The rug on the floor, four pictures on the walls, and the man who looked at her as she entered.

They gazed at each other, Cake and this man, with sudden, intense concentration. He was a genius in his line, she as surely one in hers. And, instinctively, to that strange, bright flame each rendered instant homage. What he saw he described long afterward when a million voices were vociferously raised in a million different descriptions. What she saw she likened in her mind to a dark sheath from which a sword flashed gloriously. That sword was his soul.

"He says your name is Plain Cake—is that true?" He referred to the lodger's letter held open in his hand, and by that

she knew he was Arthur Noyes. And great. That last she had not needed any telling.

"Yes," she replied.

"He says you are the right Shakespearian actress for me," Noyes referred to the letter again. "Do you know Shakespeare?"

"All the way," said Cake. It was not quite the answer *Queen Katherine* might have made, perhaps, but her manner was perfect.

"Come here"—he pointed to the centre of the rapturous rug—"and do the potion scene for me." Cake stepped forward.

Perhaps you have been so fortunate as to see her. If so you know that to step forward is her only preparation. She was poised, she was gone. Then suddenly she heard the lodger's voice crying:

"Stop—my God, stop! How do you get that way? Don't you know there's a limit to human endurance, alley-cat?"

She broke off, staring confusedly into space just the height of his debauched old figure crouching on the dry-goods box. Then with swift realization of her surroundings, her vision cleared. It was the fat man in the checked suit she saw leaning helplessly against the closed door. His jaw sagged, his eyes were frightfully popped, his face wore the same strained, queer look she had come to see so often on the lodger's, and he made weak little flapping gestures with his hands.

Cake looked then at Arthur Noyes. His face was white as the letter in his hand, his dark eyes were dilated with a look of dreadful suffering, the numb, unconscious reaction of one who has received a mortal blow.

"Come here, Crum," he cried as if there was no one else in the room. And Crum fairly tottered forward.

"What do you make of this?" asked Noyes, while Cake stood and listened.

"I—I——" stammered Crum exhaustedly. "My God," he groaned, "it's too much for me. And training!"

"Oh, trained," Cake heard Noyes say. "Such training as only he could give. Years of it, that's plain. And then to send her to me. A Shakespearean actress for me! To insult me like that——"

"It's too much for me, Boss," said Crum again. "Still—— Oh—oh, my!" His back was turned, but Cake saw his whole body shake.

"Telephone Meier," exclaimed Noyes suddenly.

"Meier?" Crum became immediately composed, and Cake saw that he was tremendously surprised. "You don't mean that you're going to—— After this? Why, she's in the know. Look at her. It's perfect!"

And they both turned and looked at Cake standing unconscious and serene on the other side of the room. You who have seen her know just how perfect the pose was.

"It *is* perfect," Noyes said. "I'd be a pretty poor sport if I did not acknowledge that." Then his voice dropped and Cake only caught snatches here and there. ". . . such genius . . . once in a century . . . get even with him in a way he least expects . . . wipe off the slate entirely . . . no comeback to my play . . . let him see that for himself. Call Meier." Then he turned to Cake.

"Sit down, please," he said courteously. "I have sent for a man who may give you an engagement."

She returned his gaze so quietly that he was puzzled. About her was neither nervous anticipation nor flighty vivacity. The actions of her audience of two left her inquisitive and calm. You see, she was used to the lodger. Also she had worked to be famous so long that all the flowery borders of self were worn down to the keen edge of doing. Of Plain Cake she thought not at all. But then, she never had. Only of the light at the end of the passage that now loomed so bright to her watching eyes.

It seemed only a minute before Noyes spoke again: "This is Mr. Meier." He regarded her shrewdly all the time.

Cake bowed to Mr. Meier, a fat, gaudy gentleman with thick, hairy hands. And Mr. Meier looked at Noyes and shook his head. She realized they had already been talking together.

"Never before," Mr. Meier said.

"If you will repeat the potion scene," Arthur Noyes suggested. "This time, I trust, you will not be interrupted," he added politely.

And Cake stepped once more into that rich orgy of emotion.



This time, though dimly aware of noise and a confusion of shouting, she carried the scene through to the end. "Romeo, I come! This do I drink to thee." She lay for a moment where she had fallen close to the heavenly colours of the rug.

"Goo-hood Gaw-hud!" gasped Mr. Meier, and Cake sat up.

She saw he was rather collapsed upon a chair near which he had been standing up when she began. His fat face was purple, and tears stood in his eyes. But Arthur Noyes had not changed. White, with that look of mortal hurt, he still stood straight and slim against the table.

"You cannot offer her less than two hundred a week to begin," he said with the same air of being alone with Mr. Meier.

"No, oh, no, no, no, no!" sighed Mr. Meier, wiping his eyes.

He rose and bowed to Cake with the queerest respect, still wiping his eyes with the back of his thick, hairy hands. It was a striking commentary upon her years of training that both of these men, successful from long and hard experience, paid her the compliment of thinking her an old hand at the game.

"Mine is the Imperial Theatre, Miss," said Meier. "You should be there to-night by seven o'clock. It ain't necessary we should rehearse. No, oh, no, no, no, no! And now, perhaps"—he looked her up and down, oddly—"perhaps I can take you to your—hotel?"

Cake looked him back, serene in her belief in what the lodger had taught her.

"I'll be there at seven," she said. "No, thank you." She walked out and across into a small park where she sat until the appointed time.

Then she went to the stage entrance of the Imperial Theatre, presented the card Mr. Meier had given her, and entered. Once inside she was taken to a dressing room by a fat, comfortable, middle-aged woman who seemed to be waiting for her. After a very short and, to Cake, tranquil period, Mr. Meier bustled in.

"Of course, Miss, you know this is a Revue," he explained, rubbing his hands with a deference that Cake shed utterly, because she did not know it was there.

She nodded, accepting his statement. "We make 'em laugh here," said Mr. Meier. Again Cake nodded; she knew

exactly as much about the show as she did before. "You close the second act; it's the best place for you. Leafy, here, will help you dress."

Cake sat still while Leafy dressed her, very hushed and still. The light blazed so near after all these hard, lean years of pursuit, years in which the little affairs of life, like the business of growing from a child to a woman, had simply passed her by. Of that Urge to be famous she was even more burningly aware; herself she did not know at all.

Mr. Meier came and took her by the hand. His fat face was pale and sweating, he seemed almost awestruck by Cake's calm. He drew her out of the dressing room and through a crowd of people, men and women with painted faces, some beautifully, some extravagantly and strangely dressed. They all stared. One woman shook her head. A man said: "Search me! I never saw *her* before."

Then Mr. Meier thrust her out in the face of a bright light. "Begin," he said hoarsely. "Walk over there and begin."

Quietly Cake obeyed. She had walked right into the bright light that had drawn her so hard and so long. Of course it was time for her to begin. And with this bright light in her face, which soon became to her the candle in that dark room left so far behind, she fared away to the magic land of beautiful make-believe.

And only when *Juliet*, that precocious child, sank down poisoned did she become aware of the uproar about her. The shouts of the lodger, "Stop—my God, stop! How do you get that way?" augmented a million times. It was this she heard.

Slowly Cake lifted herself on her hands, dazedly she peered through the heart of the great light that had caused her such suffering and that she had followed faithfully so bitterly long. On the other side she saw faces, rows and rows of them mounting up to the very roof. Faces laughing; faces convulsed, streaming with tears; faces with eyes fixed and wearing that same queer, strained look she had noticed before; hundreds of faces topping each other in semicircular rows, all different but all alike in that they were all laughing.

She rose to her knees and rested there on all fours—staring. Laughter! A great clapping of hands rolled about her like

thunder, dying down and rising again to even greater volume. Cries of "Go on," assailed her ears, mingled with, "Stop, stop! I can't bear it!"

The curtain fell before her, blotting out the vision of those faces, making the uproar slightly dimmer. Mr. Meier advanced and lifted her to her feet. He moved weakly, exhausted with mirth.

"Even Noyes," he gasped. "He—he can't help it. Oh, my goo-hood Gaw-hud!"

Cake looked away from him to the men and women that thronged about her. The same faces that had turned to her such a short while ago; but now, how different!

"Oh, don't criticise," one woman cried. "Hand it to her! She can't be beat. She's the one that comes once in a century to show the rest of us what really can be done."

"Meier," shouted a man. "Meier—she'll have to go back, Meier; she's stopped the show."

Quiet and very still, Cake drew away.

It seemed to her only a moment later that Leafy touched her arm.

"Mr. Meier has taken a suite for you here in this hotel," she said. "Can't you eat a little, Miss?"

Eat? She had never had enough to eat in her life. Her life? She had spent her life securing food for the lodger that he might teach her to be famous. Leafy lifted the spoon of hot soup to her lips and immediately she drank—she who had never had enough to eat in her life. Morsel by morsel from the bountifully filled table the kindly dresser fed her. Obediently she ate, and the hot, rich food stimulated her to swifter, more agonizing thought.

Then, for the first time, she saw Arthur Noyes standing with his back against a closed door. She read pity in his eyes, comprehension, great wonder, and what she did not know then was the love that came to a rare perfection between them and has never faded—and has no place in this story.

"Will you tell me," he said, "what your name is, where your home is, and who are those that love you there?"

Then he broke off and shrank a little against the door. "Oh, don't," he protested.

Yet she had only looked at him and smiled. But it came

to her keenly in her new awareness that his questions covered the whole of a woman's life: Her name, her home, and the ones that loved her there. While she—she had no name, she did not even know the lodger's name. She looked down with strange astonishment at her grown-up figure, her woman's hands. She saw herself a ragged, gaunt, bushy-headed child moving on a tight rope above a dark abyss, intent only upon a luminous globe floating just out of reach ahead of her, that she stretched out for eagerly with both her hands. Suddenly the lovely bubble burst and the child was a woman, falling and falling among rows of convulsed, shining white faces to the sound of gargantuan laughter.

"You tell me," Arthur Noyes pleaded gently.

And she did so very simply and beautifully. She did know Shakespeare; it was the only English that she had ever been taught. So Noyes heard how she became an instrument in the hands of the man who hated him mortally, and owed her début and her terrible awakening to what he considered the only sporting answer to that insult. While he listened he pondered, awestruck, upon the fact that out of all this muck and blackness, the degradation of hate by the lodger, the refinement of hate by himself, had flowered that rarest of all human creatures—one that could make the whole world laugh.

"He always hated me," he said. "I told him he had traded his genius for drink, and he never forgave me. Where is he now?"

"Now?" Cake looked up at him in startled wonder. It came over her suddenly that he counted upon the lodger's being in the Imperial Theatre that night.

"Now?" she repeated. "Why, he is dead."

It took Noyes a minute to recover. "What will you do?" he asked her. "Will you go on from this start, continue this—this sort of success?" He felt it the basest cruelty, in the face of her story, to say it was the only kind she was ever destined to make. He waited for her answer, wondering, and a little awestruck. It seemed to him they had come to the supreme test of her genius.

And she looked up at him with such sadness and such mirth—such tragic, humorous appreciation of the darkness in which she had been born, the toilsome way she had travelled

to the Great Light and what it actually revealed when she arrived.

"I will go on from this success," she said. Involuntarily she raised her hand to her breast. "I must, since it is the only way for me. You see," with a humour far more touching than the saddest tears, "I must be famous."

And she smiled that smile that hurt him, the smile the world loves and will give anything to see.

The most famous funmaker of her time looked away from the bright river fleeting beyond the trees to her giggling, half-terrified visitors.

"Fame," she said, "is a secret that cannot be told. It must be discovered by the seeker. Let me offer you tea as a substitute."

# MUMMERY

By THOMAS BEER

*From Saturday Evening Post*

ON MONDAY Mrs. Egg put her husband on the east-bound express with many orders. He was not to annoy Adam by kissing him when they met, if they met in public. He was to let Adam alone in the choice of civil dress, if Adam wanted to change his naval costume in New York. He was not to get lost in Brooklyn, as he had done before. He was to visit the largest moving-picture theatres and report the best films on his return. She made sure that Egg had her written list of lesser commands safe in his wallet, then folded him to her bosom, sniffed, and patted him up the steps of the coach.

A red-haired youth leaned through an open window and inquired, "Say, lady, would you mind tellin' me just what you weigh?"

"I ain't been on the scales in years, bub," said Mrs. Egg equably; "not since about when you was born. Does your mamma ever wash out your mouth with soap?"

An immediate chorus of laughter broke from the platform loungers. The train jerked forward. The youth pulled in his head. Mrs. Egg stood puffing triumphantly with her hands on her hips.

"It's a shame," the baggage-master told her, "that a lady can't be kind of—kind of——"

"Fat," said Mrs. Egg; "and bein' tall makes it worse. All the Packers 've always been tall. When we get fat we're holy shows. But if that kid's mother's done her duty by him he'd keep his mouth shut."

The dean of the loungers put in, "Your papa was always skinny, Myrtle."

"I can't remember him much," Mrs. Egg panted, "but

he looks skinny in his pictures. Well, I got to get home. There's a gentleman coming over from Ashland to look at a bull."

She trod the platform toward the motor at the hitching rails, and several loungers came along gallantly. Mrs. Egg cordially thanked them as she sank into the driving seat, settled her black straw hat, and drove off.

Beholding two of her married daughters on the steps of the drug store, she stopped the car and shouted: "Hey, girls, the fleet's gettin' in to-morrow. Your papa's gone to meet Dammy. I just shoved him on the train. By gee! I forgot to tell him he was to fetch home—no, I wrote that down—well, you come out to supper Wednesday night."

"But can Dammy get discharged all in one day?" a daughter asked.

Mrs. Egg had no patience with such imbecility. She snapped, "Did you think they'd discharge him a foot at a time, Susie?" and drove on up the street, where horse-chestnuts were ready to bloom, appropriately, since Adam was fond of the blossoms. She stopped the car five times to tell the boys that Adam would be discharged to-morrow, and made a sixth stop at the candy shop, where a clerk brought out a chocolate ice cream with walnut sauce. He did this mechanically. Mrs. Egg beamed at him, although the fellow was a newcomer and didn't know Adam.

"My boy'll be home Wednesday," she said, giving the dish back.

"Been in the Navy three-four years, ain't he?"

Mrs. Egg sighed. "April 14, 1917. He was twenty-one las' week, so he gets discharged soon as the fleet hits New York. My gee, think of Dammy being twenty-one!"

She drove on, marvelling at time, and made her seventh stop at the moving-picture theatre. The posters of the new feature film looked dull. The heavily typed list of the current-events weekly took her sharp eye. She read, "Rome Celebrates Anniversary—Fleet Sails from Guantánamo," and chuckled. She must drive in to see the picture of the fleet. She hadn't time to stop now, as lunch would be ready. Anyhow, night was the time for movies. She drove on, and the brick business buildings gave out into a dribble of small

frame cottages, mostly shabby. Edith Webb was coming out of her father's gate.

Mrs. Egg made an eighth halt and yelled, "Hey, Edie, Dammy'll be home Wednesday night," for the pleasure of seeing the pretty girl flush. Adam had taken Edith to several dances at Christmas. Mrs. Egg chuckled as the favoured virgin went red, fingering the top of the gatepost. Edith would do. In fact, Edith was suitable, entirely.

"Well, I'm glad," the girl said. "Oh, say, was it our house or the next one you used to live in? Papa was wondering last night."

"It was yours," Mrs. Egg declared; "and thank your stars you've got a better father than I had, Edie. Yes, right here's where I lived when I was your age and helped Mamma do sewin', and sometimes didn't get enough to eat. I wonder if that's why—well, anyhow, it's a solid-built house. I expect Dammy'll call you up Wednesday night." She chuckled immensely and drove on again.

From the edge of town she passed steadily a quarter of a mile between her husband's fields. His cows were grazing in the pastures. His apple trees were looking well. The red paint of his monstrous water tanks soothed her by their brilliance. A farmhand helped her out of the car and she took the shallow veranda steps one at a time, a little moody, wishing that her mother was still alive to see Adam's glory. However, there were six photographs of Adam about the green sitting room in various uniforms, and these cheered her moment of sorrow. They weren't altogether satisfactory. His hard size didn't show in single poses. He looked merely beautiful. Mrs. Egg sniffled happily, patting the view of Adam in white duck. The enlarged snapshot portrayed him sitting astride a turret gun. It was the best of the lot, although he looked taller in wrestling tights, but that picture worried her. She had always been afraid that he might kill someone in a wrestling match. She took the white-duck photograph to lunch and propped it against the pitcher of iced milk.

"It'll be awful gettin' him clothes," she told the cook; "except shoes. Thank God, his feet ain't as big as the rest of him! Say, remind me to make a coconut cake in the morning in the big pan. He likes 'em better when they're two



or three days old so the icin's kind of spread into the cake. I'd of sent a cake on with his papa, but Mr. Egg always drops things so much. It does seem——" The doorbell rang. Mrs. Egg wiped her mouth and complained, "Prob'ly that gentleman from Ashland to look at that bull calf. It does seem a shame folks drop in at mealtimes. Well, go let him in, Sadie."

The cook went out through the sitting room and down the hall. Mrs. Egg patted her black hair, sighed at her third chop and got up. The cook's voice mingled with a drawling man's tone. Mrs. Egg drank some milk and waited an announcement. The cook came back into the dining room and Mrs. Egg set down the milk glass swiftly, saying, "Why, Sadie!"

"He—he says he's your father, Mis' Egg."

After a moment Mrs. Egg said, "Stuff and rubbidge! My father ain't been seen since 1882. What's the fool look like?"

"Awful tall—kinda skinny—bald——"

A tremor went down Mrs. Egg's back. She walked through the sitting room and into the sunny hall. The front door was open. Against the apple boughs appeared a black length, topped by a gleam. The sun sparkled on the old man's baldness. A shivering memory recalled that her father's hair had been thin. His dark face slid into a mass of twisting furrows as Mrs. Egg approached him.

He whispered, "I asked for Myrtle Packer down round the station. An old feller said she was married to John Egg. You ain't Myrtle?"

"I'm her," said Mrs. Egg.

Terrible cold invaded her bulk. She laced her fingers across her breast and gazed at the twisting face.

The whisper continued: "They tell me your mamma's in the cem'tery, Myrtle. I've come home to lay alongside of her. I'm grain for the grim reaper's sickle. In death we sha'n't be divided; and I've walked half the way from Texas. Don't expect you'd want to kiss me. You look awful like her, Myrtle."

Tears rolled out of his eyes down his hollowed cheeks, which seemed almost black between the high bones. His pointed chin quivered. He made a wavering gesture of both

hands and sat down on the floor. Behind Mrs. Egg the cook sobbed aloud. A farmhand stood on the grass by the outer steps, looking in. Mrs. Egg shivered. The old man was sobbing gently. His head oscillated and its polish repelled her. He had abandoned her mother in 1882.

"Mamma died back in 1910," she said. "I dunno—well——"

The sobbing was thin and weak, like an ailing baby's murmur. It pounded her breast.

She stared at the ancient dusty suitcase on the porch and said, "Come up from Texas, have you?"

"There's no jobs lef' for a man seventy-six years of age, Myrtle, except dyin.' I run a saloon in San Antonio by the Plaza. Walked from Greenville, Mississippi, to Little Rock. An old lady give me carfare, there, when I told her I was goin' home to my wife that I'd treated so bad. There's plenty Christians in Arkansaw. And they've pulled down the old Presbyterian church your mamma and I was married in."

"Yes; last year. Sadie, take Mr. Packer's bag up to the spare room. Stop cryin', Papa."

She spoke against her will. She could not let him sit on the floor sobbing any longer. His gleaming head afflicted her. She had a queer emotion. This seemed most unreal. The gray hall wavered like a flashing view in a film.

"The barn'd be a fitter place for me, daughter. I've been a——"

"That's all right, Papa. You better go up and lie down, and Sadie'll fetch you up some lunch."

His hand was warm and lax. Mrs. Egg fumbled with it for a moment and let it fall. He passed up the stairs, drooping his head. Mrs. Egg heard the cook's sympathy explode above and leaned on the wall and thought of Adam coming home Wednesday night. She had told him a thousand times that he mustn't gamble or mistreat women or chew tobacco "like your Grandfather Packer did." And here was Grandfather Packer, ready to welcome Adam home!

The farmhand strolled off, outside, taking the seed of this news. It would be in town directly.

"Oh, Dammy," she said, "and I wanted everything nice for you!"

In the still hall her one sob sounded like a shout. Mrs. Egg marched back to the dining room and drank a full glass of milk to calm herself.

"Says he can't eat nothin', Mis' Egg," the cook reported, "but he'd like a cup of tea. It's real pitiful. He's sayin' the Twenty-third Psalm to himself. Wasted to a shadder. Asked if Mr. Egg was as Christian an' forbearin' as you. Mebbe he could eat some buttered toast."

"Try and see, Sadie; and don't bother me. I got to think."

She thought steadily, eating cold rice with cream and apple jelly. Her memory of Packer was slim. He had spanked her for spilling ink on his diary. He had been a carpenter. His brothers were all dead. He had run off with a handsome Swedish servant girl in 1882, leaving her mother to sew for a living. What would the county say? Mrs. Egg writhed and recoiled from duty. Perhaps she would get used to the glittering bald head and the thin voice. It was all most unreal. Her mother had so seldom talked of the runaway that Mrs. Egg had forgotten him as possibly alive. And here he was! What did one do with a prodigal father? With a jolt she remembered that there would be roast veal for supper.

At four, while she was showing the Ashland dairyman the bull calf, child of Red Rover VII and Buttercup IV, Mrs. Egg saw her oldest daughter's motor sliding across the lane from the turnpike. It held all three of her female offspring. Mrs. Egg groaned, drawling commonplaces to her visitor, but he stayed a full hour, admiring the new milk shed and the cider press. When she waved him good-bye from the veranda she found her daughters in a stalwart group by the sitting-room fireplace, pink eyed and comfortably emotional. They wanted to kiss her. Mrs. Egg dropped into her particular mission chair and grunted, batting off embraces.

"I suppose it's all over town? It'd travel fast. Well, what d'you think of your grandpapa, girls?"

"Don't talk so loud, Mamma," one daughter urged.

Another said, "He's so tired he went off asleep while he was telling us how he nearly got hung for shooting a man in San Antonio."

Mrs. Egg reached for the glass urn full of chocolate wafers on the table and put one in her mouth. She remarked, "I

can see you've been having a swell time, girls. A sinner that repenteth——"

"Why, Mamma!"

"Listen," said Mrs. Egg; "if there's going to be any forgiving done around here, it's me that'll do it. You girls was raised with all the comforts of home and then some. You never helped anybody do plain sewin' at fifteen cents a hour nor had to borrow money to get a decent dress to be married in. This thing of hearin' how he shot folks and kept a saloon in Texas is good as a movie to you. It don't set so easy on me. I'm old and tough. And I'll thank you to keep your mouths shut. Here's Dammy comin' home Wednesday out of the Navy, and all this piled up on me. I don't want every lazyjake in the country pilin' in here to hear what a bad man he's been, and dirty the carpets up. Dammy likes things clean. I'm a better Christian than a lot of folks I can think of, but this looks to me like a good deal of a bread-and-butter repentance. Been devourin' his substance in Texas and come home to——"

"Oh, Mamma, your own papa!"

"That's as may be. My own mamma busted her eyesight and got heart trouble for fifteen mortal years until your papa married me and gave her a home for her old age, and never a whimper out of her, neither. She's where she can't tell me what she thinks of him and I dunno what to think. But I'll do my own thinkin' until Dammy and your papa gets back and tell me what they think. This is your papa's place—and Dammy's. It ain't a boardin' house for——"

"Oh, Mamma!"

"And it's time for my nap."

Susan, the oldest daughter, made a tremulous protest. "He's seventy-six years old, Mamma, and whatever he's done——"

"For a young woman that talked pretty loud of leavin' her husband when he came home kind of lit up from a club meetin'——" Mrs. Egg broke in. Susan collapsed and drew her gloves on hastily. Mrs. Egg ate another chocolate wafer and resumed: "This here's my business—and your papa's and Dammy's. I've got it in my head that that movie weekly picture they had of Buttercup Four with her price wrote out must have been shown in San Antonio.

And you'll recollect that your papa and me stood alongside her while that fresh cameraman took the picture. If I was needin' a meal and saw I'd got a well-off son-in-law——"

"Mamma," said Susan, "you're perfectly cynical."

Mrs. Egg pronounced, "I'm forty-five years of age," and got up.

The daughters withdrew. Mrs. Egg covered the chocolate urn with a click and went into the kitchen. Two elderly farmhands went out of the porch door as she entered.

Mrs. Egg told the cook: "Least said, soon'st mended, Sadie. Give me the new cream. I guess I might's well make some spice cookies. Be pretty busy Wednesday. Dammy likes 'em a little stale."

"Mis' Egg," said the cook, "if this was Dammy that'd kind of strayed off and come home sick in his old age——"

"Give me the cream," Mrs. Egg commanded, and was surprised by the fierceness of her own voice. "I don't need any help seein' my duty, thanks!"

At six o'clock her duty became highly involved. A friend telephoned from town that the current-events weekly at the moving-picture theatre showed Adam in the view of the dreadnoughts at Guantánamo.

"Get out," said Adam's mother. "You're jokin'! . . . Honest? Well, it's about time! What's he doin'? . . . Wrestlin'? My! Say, call up the theatre and tell Mr. Rubenstein to save me a box for the evenin' show."

"I hear your father's come home," the friend insinuated.

"Yes," Mrs. Egg drawled, "and ain't feelin' well and don't need comp'ny. Be obliged if you'd tell folks that. He's kind of sickly. So they've got Dammy in a picture. It's about time!" The tremor ran down her back. She said "Good-night, dearie," and rang off.

The old man was standing in the hall doorway, his head a vermilion ball in the crossed light of the red sunset.

"Feel better, Papa?"

"As good as I'm likely to feel in this world again. You look real like your mother settin' there, Myrtle." The whisper seemed likely to ripen as a sob.

Mrs. Egg answered, "Mamma had yellow hair and never weighed more'n a hundred and fifty pounds to the day of her death. What'd you like for supper?"

He walked slowly along the room, his knees sagging, twitching from end to end. She had forgotten how tall he was. His face constantly wrinkled. It was hard to see his eyes under their long lashes. Mrs. Egg felt the pity of all this in a cold way.

She said, when he paused: "That's Adam, there, on the mantelpiece, Papa. Six feet four and a half he is. It don't show in a picture."

"The Navy's rough kind of life, Myrtle. I hope he ain't picked up bad habits. The world's full of pitfalls."

"Sure," said Mrs. Egg, shearing the whisper. "Only Dammy ain't got any sense about cards. I tried to teach him pinochle, but he never could remember none of it, and the hired men always clean him out shakin' dice. He can't even beat his papa at checkers. And that's an awful thing to say of a bright boy!"

The old man stared at the photograph and his forehead smoothed for a breath. Then he sighed and drooped his chin.

"If I'd stayed by right principles when I was young——"

"D'you still keep a diary, Papa?"

"I did used to keep a diary, didn't I? I'd forgotten that. When you come to my age, Myrtle, you'll find yourself forgettin' easy. If I could remember any good things I ever did——"

The tears dripped from his jaw to the limp breast of his coat. Mrs. Egg felt that he must be horrible, naked, like a doll carved of coconut bark Adam had sent home from Havana. He was darker than Adam even. In the twilight the hollows of his face were sheer black. The room was gray. Mrs. Egg wished that the film would hurry and show something brightly lit.

The dreary whisper mourned, "Grain for the grim reaper's sickle, that's what I am. Tares mostly. When I'm gone you lay me alongside your mamma and——"

"Supper's ready, Mis' Egg," said the cook.

Supper was odious. He sat crumbling bits of toast into a bowl of hot milk and whispering feeble questions about dead folk or the business of the vast dairy farm. The girls had been too kind, he said.

"I couldn't help but feel that if they knew all about me——"

"They're nice sociable girls," Mrs. Egg panted, dizzy with dislike of her veal. She went on: "And they like a good cry, never havin' had nothin' to cry for."

His eyes opened wide in the lamplight, gray brilliance sparkled. Mrs. Egg stiffened in her chair, meeting the look.

He wailed, "I gave you plenty to cry for, daughter." The tears hurt her, of course.

"There's a picture of Dammy in the movies," she gasped. "I'm goin' in to see it. You better come. It'll cheer you, Papa."

She wanted to recall the offer too late. In the car she felt chilly. He sank into a corner of the tonneau like a thrown laprobe. Mrs. Egg talked loudly about Adam all the way to town and shouted directions to the driving farm-hand in order that the whisper might not start. The manager of the theatre had saved a box for her and came to usher her to its discomfort. But all her usual pleasure was gone. She nodded miserably over the silver-gilt rail at friends. She knew that people were craning from far seats. Her bulk and her shadow effaced the man beside her. He seemed to cower a little. At eight the show began, and Mrs. Egg felt darkness as a blessing, although the shimmer from the screen ran like phosphorus over the bald head, and a flash of white between two parts of the advertisement showed the dark wrinkles of his brow.

"Like the pictures, Papa?"

"I don't see well enough to take much pleasure in 'em, Myrtle."

A whirling globe announced the beginning of the weekly. Mrs. Egg forgot her burdens. She was going to see Adam. She took a peppermint from the bag in her hand and set her teeth in its softness, applauded a view of the President and the arrival of an ambassador in New York. Then the greenish letters declared: "The fleet leaves Guantánamo training ground," and her eyes hurt with staring. The familiar lines of anchored battleships appeared with a motion of men in white on the gray decks. The screen showed a race of boats which melted without warning to a mass of white uniforms packed about the raised square of a roped-in platform below guns and a turret clouded with men. Two

tanned giants in wrestling tights scrambled under the ropes. There was a flutter of caps.

"Oh!" said Mrs. Egg. "Oh!"

She stood up. The view enlarged. Adam was plain as possible. He grinned, too; straight from the screen at her. The audience murmured. Applause broke out, Adam jerked his black head to his opponent—and the view flicked off in some stupid business of admirals. Mrs. Egg sat down and sobbed.

"Was that Adam, daughter? The—the big feller with black hair?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Egg; "yes." She was hot with rage against the makers of pictures who'd taken him from her. It was a shame. She crammed four peppermints into her mouth and groaned about them, "As if people wouldn't rather look at some good wrestlin' than a lot of captains and stuff!"

"How long's the boy been in the Navy, Myrtle?"

"April 14, 1917."

The whisper restored her. Mrs. Egg yawned for an hour of nonsense about a millionaire and his wife who was far too thin. Her father did not speak, although he moved now and then. The show concluded. Mrs. Egg lumbered wearily out to her car in the dull street and vaguely listened to the whisper of old age. She couldn't pay attention. She was going home to write the film company at length. This abuse of Adam was intolerable. She told the driver so. The driver agreed.

He reported, "I was settin' next to Miss Webb."

"That's Dammy's girl, Papa. Go on, Sam. What did Edie say?"

"Well," said the driver, "she liked seein' the kid. She cried, anyhow."

Mrs. Egg was charmed by the girl's good sense. The moon looked like a quartered orange over the orchard.

She sighed, "Well, he'll be home Wednesday night, anyhow. Edie ain't old enough to get married yet. Hey, what's the house all lit up for? Sadie ought to know better."

She prepared a lecture for the cook. The motor shot up the drive into a babble and halted at the steps. Someone



immense rose from a chair and leaped down the space in one stride.

Adam said, "H'lo, Mamma," and opened the car door.

Mrs. Egg squealed. The giant lifted her out of her seat and carried her into the sitting room. The amazing muscles rose in the flat of his back. She thought his overshirt ripped. The room spun. Adam fanned her with his cap and grinned.

"Worst of radiograms," he observed; "the boys say Papa went on to meet me. Well, it'll give him a trip. Quit cryin', Mamma."

"Oh, Dammy, and there ain't nothin' fit to eat in the house!"

Adam grinned again. The farmhands dispersed at his nod. Mrs. Egg beat down her sobs with both hands and decried the radio service that could turn Sunday into Tuesday. Here was Adam, though, silently grinning, his hands available, willing to eat anything she had in the pantry. Mrs. Egg crowed her rapture in a dozen bursts.

The whispering voice crept into a pause with, "You'll be wantin' to talk to your boy, daughter. I'll go to bed, I guess."

"Dammy," said Mrs. Egg, "this is——"

Adam stopped rolling a cigarette and nodded to the shadow by the hall door. He said, "How you? The boys told me you'd got here," and licked the cigarette shut with a flash of his red tongue. He struck a match on the blue coating of one lean thigh and lit the cigarette, then stared at the shadow. Mrs. Egg hated the old man against reason as the tears slid down the dark face.

"Grain for the grim reaper's sickle, daughter. You'll be wantin' to talk to your boy. I guess I'll say good-night." He faded into the hall.

"Well, come, let's see what there is to eat, Mamma," said Adam, and pulled Mrs. Egg from her chair.

He sat on the low ice chest in the pantry and ate chocolate cake. Mrs. Egg uncorked pear cider and reached, panting, among apple-jelly glasses. Adam seldom spoke. She didn't expect talk from him. He was sufficient. He nodded and ate. The tanned surface of his throat dimpled when he swallowed things. His small nose wrinkled when he chewed.

Mrs. Egg chattered confusedly. Adam grinned when she patted his smooth hair and once said "Get out!" when she paused between two kisses to assure him he was handsome. He had his father's doubts on the point perhaps. He was not, she admitted, exactly beautiful. He was Adam, perfect and hard as an oak trunk under his blue clothes. He finished the chocolate cake and began to eat bread and apple jelly.

He ate six slices and drank a mug of pear cider, then crossed his legs and drawled, "Was a fellow on the *Nevada* they called Frisco Cooley?"

"What about him, Dammy?"

"Nothin'. He was as tall as me. Skinny, though. Used to imitate actors in shows. Got discharged in 1919."

"Was he a nice boy, Dammy?"

"No," said Adam, and reached for the pear-cider bottle. He fell into his usual calm and drank another mug of cider. Mrs. Egg talked of Edie Webb. Adam grinned and kept his black eyes on the pantry ceiling. The clock struck eleven. He said, "They called him Frisco Cooley 'cause he came from San Francisco. He could wrinkle his face up like a monkey. He worked in a gamblin' joint in San Francisco. That's him." Adam jerked a thumb at the ceiling.

"Dammy!"

"That's him," said Adam. "It took me a time to think of him, but that's him."

Mrs. Egg fell back against the ice chest and squeaked: "You mean you know this——"

"Hush up, Mamma!"

"But he walked part the way from San Antonio. He——"

"He ain't your father," said Adam, "so don't cry. Is there any maple sugar? The grub on the train was fierce."

Mrs. Egg brought him the tin case of maple sugar. Adam selected a chunk of the brown stuff and bit a lobe of it. He was silent. Mrs. Egg marvelled at him. His sisters had hinted that he wasn't clever. She stood in awe, although her legs ached. Adam finished the lump of maple sugar and rose. He leaned on the shelves with his narrow waist curved against them and studied a row of quince-preserve jars. His nose wrinkled.

He asked, "You been fumigatin'?"

"Fumigatin'! Why, Dammy, there ain't been a disease in the house since you had whoopin' cough."

"Sulphur," Adam drawled.

"Why, Dammy Egg! I never used sulphur for nothin' in my life!"

He took a jar of preserves and ripped off the paraffin wafer that covered the top. Then he set the jar aside and sat down on the floor. Mrs. Egg watched him unlace his shoes.

He commanded, "You sit still, Mamma. Be back in a minute."

"Dammy, don't you go near that heathen!"

"I ain't."

He swung across the kitchen floor in two strides and bumped his head on the top of the door. Mrs. Egg winced, but all her body seemed to move after the boy. Shiverings tossed her. She lifted her skirts and stepped after him. The veranda was empty. Adam had vanished, although the moon covered the dooryard with silver. The woman stared and shook. Then something slid down the nearest pillar and dropped like a black column to the grass. Adam came up the steps and shoved Mrs. Egg back to the pantry.

He spread some quince preserve on a slab of bread and stated, "He's sittin' up readin' a lot of old copybooks, kind of. Got oil all over his head. It's hair remover. Sulphur in it."

"How could you ever smell that far, Dammy?"

"I wonder what's in those books?" Adam pondered. He sat cross-legged on the ice chest and ate slowly for a time, then remarked, "You didn't put up these quinces, Mamma."

"No; they're Sadie's. Think of your noticin'!"

"You got to teach Edie cookin'," he said. "She can't cook fit for a Cuban. Lots of time, though. Now, Mamma, we can't let this goof stay here all night. I guess he's a thief. I ain't goin' to let the folks have a laugh on you. Didn't your father always keep a diary?"

"Think of your rememberin' that, Dammy! Yes, always."

"That's what Frisco's readin' up in. He's smart. Used to do im'tations of actors and cry like a hose pipe. Spotted that. Where's the strawb'ry jam?"

"Right here, Dammy. Dammy, suppose he killed Papa somewheres off and stole his diaries!"

"Well," said Adam, beginning strawberry jam, "I thought of that. Mebbe he did. I'd better find out. Y'oughtn't to kill folks even if they're no good for nothin'."

"I'll go down to the barn and wake some of the boys up," Mrs. Egg hissed.

"You won't neither, Mamma. This'd be a joke on you. I ain't goin' to have folks sayin' you took this guy for your father. Fewer knows it, the better. This is awful good jam." He grinned and pulled Mrs. Egg down beside him on the chest. She forgot to be frightened, watching the marvel eat. She must get larger jars for jam. He reflected: "You always get enough to eat on a boat, but it ain't satisfyin'. Frisco prob'ly uses walnut juice to paint his face with. It don't wash off. Don't talkin' make a person thirsty?"

"Wait till I get you some more cider, Dammy."

Adam thoughtfully drank more pear cider and made a cigarette. Wonderful ideas must be moving behind the blank brown of his forehead. His mother adored him and planned a recital of his acts to Egg, who had accused Adam of being slow witted.

She wanted to justify herself, and muttered: "I just felt he wasn't Papa all along. He was like one of those awful sorrowful persons in a movie."

"Sure," said Adam, patting her arm. "I wish Edie'd got as nice a complexion as you, Mamma."

"Mercy, Dammy!" his mother tittered and blushed.

Adam finished a third mug of cider and got up to examine the shelves. He scratched the rear of one calf with the other toe, and muscles cavorted in both legs as he reached for a jar of grapefruit marmalade. He peered through this at the lamp and put the jar back. Mrs. Egg felt hurt.

The paragon explained: "Too sour after strawb'ry, Mamma. I'd like some for breakfast, though. Back in a minute."

He trotted out through the kitchen and vanished on the veranda. She shivered, being alone.

Adam came back and nodded: "Light's out. Any key to that room?"

"No."

"I can always think better when I'm eatin'," he confessed, and lifted down the plate of spiced cookies, rejected them as too fresh, and pounced on a covered dish of apple sauce.

This he absorbed in stillness, wriggling his toes on the oilcloth. Mrs. Egg felt entirely comfortable and real. She could hear the cook snoring. Behind her the curtain of the pantry window fluttered. The cool breeze was pleasant on her neck. Adam licked the spoon and said, "Back in a minute, Mamma," as he started for the veranda door.

Mrs. Egg reposed on the ice chest thinking about Adam. He was like Egg, in that nothing fattened him. She puzzled over to-morrow's lunch. Baked ham and sweet potatoes, sugared; creamed asparagus; hot corn muffins. Dessert perplexed her. Were there any brandied peaches left? She feared not. They belonged on the upper shelf nearest the ice chest. Anxiety chewed her. Mrs. Egg climbed the lid by the aid of the window sill and reached up an arm to the shelf.

Adam said, "Here y'are, Mamma."

The pantry door shut. Mrs. Egg swung about. Adam stood behind a shape in blue pajamas, a hand locked on either of its elbows. He grinned at Mrs. Egg over the mummer's shoulder. As the woman panted sulphur entered her throat. The lamp threw a glare into the dark face, which seemed paler.

"Go on, Frisco," said Adam, about the skull, "tell Mamma about her father."

A sharp voice answered, "Let go my arms. You're killin' me!"

"Quit kiddin'," Adam growled. "Go on!"

"He ran a joint in San Francisco and gave me a job after I got out the Navy. Died last fall. I kind of nursed him. Told me to burn all these books—diaries. I read 'em. He called himself Peterson. Left all his money to a woman. She shut the joint. I looked some like him so I took a chance. Leggo my arms, Egg!"

"He'd ought to go to jail, Dammy," said Mrs. Egg. "It's just awful! I bet the police are lookin' for him right now."

"Mamma, if we put him in jail this'll be all over the county and you'll never hear the end of it."

She stared at the ape with loathing. There was a star tattooed on one of his naked insteps. He looked no longer frail, but wiry and snakelike. The pallor behind his dark tan showed the triangles of black stain in his cheeks and eye sockets.

"He's too smart to leave loose, Dammy."

"It'll be an awful joke on you, Mamma."

"I can't help it, Dammy. He——"

The prisoned figure toppled back against Adam's breast and the mouth opened hideously. The lean legs bent.

"You squeezed him too tight, Dammy. He's fainted. Lay him down."

Adam let the figure slide to the floor. It rose in a whirl of blue linen. Mrs. Egg rocked on the chest.

The man thrust something at Adam's middle and said in a rasp, "Get your arms up!"

Adam's face turned purple beyond the gleaming skull. His hands rose a little and his fingers crisped. He drawled,

"Fact. I ought have looked under your duds, you——"

"Stick 'em up!" said the man.

Mrs. Egg saw Adam's arms tremble. His lower lip drew down. He wasn't going to put his arms up. The man would kill him. She could not breathe. She fell forward from the ice chest and knew nothing.

She roused with a sense of great cold and was sitting against the shelves. Adam stopped rubbing her face with a lump of ice and grinned at her.

He cried, "By gee, you did that quick, Mamma! Knocked the wind clear out of him."

"Where is he, Dammy?"

"Dunno. Took his gun and let him get dressed. He's gone. Say, that was slick!"

Mrs. Egg blushed and asked for a drink. Adam dropped the ice into a mug of pear cider and squatted beside her with a shabby notebook.

"Here's somethin' for October 10, 1919." He read: "Talked to a man from Ilium to-day in Palace Bar. Myrtle married to John Egg. Four children. Egg worth a wad. Dairy and cider business. Going to build new Presbyterian church." That's it, Mamma. He doped it all out from the diary."

"The dirty dog!" said Mrs. Egg. She ached terribly and put her head on Adam's shoulder.

"I'll put all the diaries up in the attic. Kind of good readin.' Say, it's after two. You better go to bed."

In her dreams Mrs. Egg beheld a bronze manacing skeleton

beside her pillow. It whispered and rattled. She woke, gulping, in bright sunlight, and the rattle changed to the noise of a motor halting on the drive. She gave yesterday a fleet review, rubbing her blackened elbows, but felt charitable toward Frisco Cooley by connotation; she had once sat down on a collie pup. But her bedroom clock struck ten times. Mrs. Egg groaned and rolled out of bed, reaching for a wrapper. What had the cook given Adam for breakfast? She charged along the upper hall into a smell of coffee, and heard Adam speaking below. His sisters made some feeble united interjection.

The hero said sharply: "Of course he was a fake! Mamma knew he was, all along, but she didn't want to let on she did in front of folks. That ain't dignified. She just flattened him out and he went away quiet. You girls always talk like Mamma hadn't as much sense as you. She's kind of used up this morning. Wait till I give her her breakfast, and I'll come talk to you."

A tray jingled.

Mrs. Egg retreated into her bedroom, awed. Adam carried in her breakfast and shut the door with a foot.

He complained: "Went in to breakfast at Edie's. Of course she's only sixteen, but I could make better biscuits myself. Lay down, Mamma."

He began to butter slices of toast, in silence, expertly. Mrs. Egg drank her coffee in rapture that rose toward ecstasy as Adam made himself a sandwich of toast and marmalade and sat down at her feet to consume it.

# THE VICTIM OF HIS VISION

By GERALD CHITTENDEN

From *Scribner's*

THERE'S no doubt about it," said the hardware drummer with the pock-pitted cheeks. He seemed glad that there was no doubt—smacked his lips over it and went on. "Obeah—that's black magic; and voodoo—that's snake-worship. The island is rotten with 'em—rotten with 'em."

He looked sidelong over his empty glass at the Reverend Arthur Simpson. Many human things were foreign to the clergyman: he was uneasy about being in the *Arequipa's* smoke-room at all, for instance, and especially uneasy about sitting there with the drummer.

"But—human sacrifice!" he protested. "You spoke of human sacrifice."

"And cannibalism. *La chèvre sans cornes*—the goat without horns—that means an unblemished child less than three years old. It's frequently done. They string it up by its heels, cut its throat, and drink the blood. Then they eat it. Regular ceremony—the *mamaloï* officiates."

"Who officiates?"

"The *mamaloï*—the priestess."

Simpson jerked himself out of his chair and went on deck. Occasionally his imagination worked loose from control and tormented him as it was doing now. There was a grizzly vividness in the drummer's description. It was well toward morning before Simpson grasped again his usual certainty of purpose and grew able to thank God that he had been born into a very wicked world. There was much for a missionary to do in Hayti—he saw that before the night grew thin, and was glad.

Between dawn and daylight the land leaped out of the sea, all clear blues and purples, incomparably fresh and incom-



parably wistful in that one golden hour of the tropic day before the sun has risen very high—the disembodied spirit of an island. It lay, vague as hope at first, in a jewel-tinted sea; the ship steamed toward it as through the mists of creation's third morning, and all good things seemed possible. Thus had Simpson, reared in an unfriendly land, imagined it, for beneath the dour Puritanism that had lapped him in its armour there still stirred the power of wonder and surprise that has so often through the ages changed Puritans to poets. That glimpse of Hayti would remain with him, he thought, yet within the hour he was striving desperately to hold it. For soon the ruffle of the breeze died from off the sea, and it became gray glass through which the anchor sank almost without a sound and was lost.

"Sweet place, isn't it, Mr. Simpson?" said Bunsen, the purser, pausing on his way to the gangway.

"So that," Simpson rejoined slowly—and because it was a port of his desire his voice shook on the words—"is Port au Prince!"

"That," Bunsen spat into the sea, "is Port au Prince."

He moved away. A dirty little launch full of uniforms was coming alongside. Until the yellow flag—a polite symbol in that port—should be hauled down Simpson would be left alone. The uniforms had climbed to the deck and were chattering in a bastard patois behind him; now and then the smell of the town struck across the smells of the sea and the bush like the flick of a snake's tail. Simpson covered his eyes for a moment, and immediately the vision of the island as he had seen it at dawn swam in his mind. But he could not keep his eyes forever shut—there was the necessity of living and of doing his work in the world to be remembered always. He removed his hand. A bumboat was made fast below the well of the deck, and a boy with an obscenely twisted body and a twisted black face was selling pineapples to the sailors. Simpson watched him for a while, and because his education had been far too closely specialized he quoted the inevitable:

"Where every prospect pleases,  
And only man is vile."

The verse uplifted him unreasonably. He went below to pack his baggage. He said good-bye to the officers, painfully

conscious that they were grinning behind his back, and was rowed ashore by the deformed boy.

The boy said something in abominable French. He repeated it—Simpson guessed at its meaning.

"I shall stay a long time," he answered in the same language. "I am a minister of the gospel—a missionary."

The cripple, bent revoltingly over his oar, suddenly broke out into laughter, soulless, without meaning. Simpson, stung sharply in his stiff-necked pride, sprang up and took one step forward, his fist raised. The boy dropped the oars and writhed to starboard, his neck askew at an eldritch angle, his eyes glaring upward. But he did not raise a hand to ward off the blow that he feared, and that was more uncanny still.

The blow never fell. Simpson's hand unclinked and shame reddened in his face.

"Give me the oars," he said. "*Pauvre garçon*—did you think that I would strike you?"

The boy surrendered the oars and sidled aft like a crab, his eyes still rolling at his passenger.

"Why should the maimed row the sound?" said Simpson.

He rowed awkwardly. The boy watched him for a moment, then grinned uncertainly; presently he lolled back in the stern-sheets, personating dignity. A white man was doing his work—it was splendid, as it should be, and comic in the extreme. He threw back his head and cackled at the hot sky.

"Stop that!" Simpson, his nerves raw, spoke in English, but the laughter jarred to a blunt end. The boy huddled farther away from him, watching him with unwinking eyes which showed white all around the pupil. Simpson, labouring with the clumsy cars, tried to forget him. It was hot—hotter than it had seemed at first; sweat ran into his eyes and he grew a little dizzy. The quarantine launch with its load of uniforms, among which the purser's white was conspicuous, passed, giving them its wake; there was no sound from it, only a blaze of teeth and eyeballs. Simpson glanced over his shoulder at it. The purser was standing in the stern, clear of the awning, his head quizzically on one side and a cigarette in his fingers.

The rowboat came abreast of a worm-eaten jetty.

"*Ici*," said the cripple.

Simpson, inexpert, bumped into it bow on, and sculled the

stern around. The cripple, hideously agile, scrambled out and held the boat; Simpson gathered up his bag and followed.

A Roman priest, black as the top of a stove, strode down the jetty toward them.

"You—you!" he shouted to the cripple when he was yet ten strides away. His voice rose as he approached. "You let the m'sieu' row you ashore! You——" A square, heavy boot shot out from beneath his cassock into the boy's stomach. "*Cochon!*" said the priest, turning to Simpson. His manner became suddenly suave, grandiose. "These swine!" he said. "One keeps them in their place. I am Father Antoine. And you?"

"Simpson—Arthur Simpson." He said his own name slowly as thought there was magic in it, magic that would keep him in touch with his beginnings.

"Simpson?" The priest gave it the French sound; suspicion struggled for expression on his black mask; his eyes took in the high-cut waistcoat, the unmistakable clerical look. "You were sent?"

"By the board of foreign missions."

"I do not know it. Not by the archbishop?"

"There is no archbishop in my Church."

"In your Church?" Father Antoine's eyes sprang wide—wide as they had been when he kicked the boatman. "In your Church? You are not of the true faith, then?"

Pride of race, unchastened because he had not till that moment been conscious that it existed in him, swelled in Simpson.

"Are you?" he asked.

Father Antoine stared at him, not as an angry white man stares, but with head thrown back and mouth partly open, in the manner of his race. Then, with the unreasoned impetuosity of a charging bull, he turned and flung shoreward down the pier. The cripple, groaning still, crawled to Simpson's feet and sat there.

"*Pauvre garçon!*" repeated Simpson dully. "*Pauvre garçon!*"

Suddenly the boy stopped groaning, swung Simpson's kit-bag on his shoulder, and sidled up the pier. His right leg bent outward at the knee, and his left inward; his head, inclined away from his burden, seemed curiously detached from

his body; his gait was a halting sort of shuffle; yet he got along with unexpected speed. Simpson, still dazed, followed him into the Grand Rue—a street of smells and piled filth, where gorged buzzards, reeking of the tomb, flapped upward under his nose from the garbage and offal of their feast. Simpson paused for a moment at the market-stalls, where negroes of all shades looked out at him in a silence that seemed devoid of curiosity. The cripple beckoned him and he hurried on. On the steps of the cathedral he saw Father Antoine, but, although the priest must have seen him, he gave no sign as he passed. He kept to what shade there was. Presently his guide turned down a narrow alley, opened a dilapidated picket gate, and stood waiting.

*"Maman !"* he called. *"Ohé ! Maman !"*

Simpson, his curiosity faintly stirring, accepted the invitation of the open gate, and stepped into an untidy yard, where three or four pigs and a dozen chickens rooted and scratched among the bayonets of yucca that clustered without regularity on both sides of the path. The house had some pretensions; there were two stories, and, although the blue and red paint had mostly flaked away, the boarding looked sound. In the yard there was less fetor than there had been outside.

*"Maman !"* called the boy again.

A pot-lid clashed inside the house, and a tall negress, dressed in a blue-striped Mother Hubbard, came to the door. She stared at Simpson and at the boy.

*"Qui ?"* was all she said.

The boy sidled nearer her and dropped the bag on the threshold.

*"Qui ?"* she said again.

Simpson waited in silence. His affairs had got beyond him somehow, and he seemed to himself but the tool of circumstance. It did occur to him, though dimly, that he was being introduced to native life rather quickly.

The cripple, squatting with his back against the bag, launched into a stream of patois, of which Simpson could not understand a word. Gestures explained somewhat; he was reënacting the scenes of the last half hour. When he had finished, the negress, not so hostile as she had been but by no means friendly, turned to Simpson and looked at him a long

time without speaking. He had all he could do not to fidget under her gaze; finally, she stood aside from the door and said, without enthusiasm:

"*B'en venu. C'est vo' masson.*"

Simpson entered automatically. The kitchen, with its hard earth floor and the sunlight drifting in through the bamboo sides, was not unclean, and a savoury smell came from the stew-pot on the ramshackle stove. In one of the bars of sunlight a mango-coloured child of two years or so was playing with his toes—he was surprisingly clean and perfectly formed.

"*Aha, mon petit!*" exclaimed Simpson. He loved children. "He is handsome," he added, addressing the woman.

"Mine!" She turned the baby gently with her foot; he caught at the hem of her dress, laughing. But she did not laugh. "Neither spot nor blemish," she said, and then: "He is not yet three years old."

Simpson shuddered, recalling the pock-marked drummer on the *Arequipa*. That was momentary—a coincidence, he told himself. The woman was looking down at the child, her eyes softer than they had been, and the child was lying on its back and playing with her Mother Hubbard.

The woman lifted the lid from the pot and peered into it through the sun-shot steam.

"It is ready," she said. She lifted it from the stove and set it on the earthen floor. The cripple placed a handful of knives and spoons on the table and three tin plates; he thrust a long fork and a long spoon into the pot and stood aside.

"Seat yourself," said the woman, without looking at Simpson, "and eat."

She explored the pot with the fork, and stabbed it firmly—there was a suggestion of ruthlessness about her action that made Simpson shudder again—into a slab of meat, which she dropped on a plate, using a callous thumb to disengage it from the tines. She covered it with gravy and began to eat without further ceremony. The cripple followed her example, slobbering the gravy noisily; some of it ran down his chin. Neither of them paid any attention to Simpson.

He took the remaining plate from the table and stood irresolute with it in his hand. He was hungry, but his essential Puritan fastidiousness, combined with that pride of race which he knew to be un-Christian, rendered him reluctant

to dip into the common pot or to eat on equal terms with these people. Besides, the sun and his amazing introduction to the island had given him a raging headache: he could not think clearly nor rid himself of the sinister suggestion of the town, of the house, of its three occupants in particular.

The child touched a finger to the hot lip of the pot, burned itself, and began to cry.

"*Taise*," said the woman. Her voice was low but curt, and she did not raise her eyes from her plate. The child, its finger in its mouth, stopped crying at once.

Simpson shook himself; his normal point of view was beginning to assert itself. He must not—must not hold himself superior to the people he expected to convert; nothing, he insisted to himself, was to be gained, and much might be lost by a refusal to meet the people "on their own ground." Chance—he did not call it chance—had favoured him incredibly thus far, and if he failed to follow the guidance that had been vouchsafed him he would prove himself but an unworthy vessel. He took up the long fork—it chattered against the pot as he seized it—and, overcoming a momentary and inexplicable nausea, impaled the first piece of meat that rolled to the surface. There were yams also and a sort of dumpling made of manioc. When he had filled his plate he rose and turned suddenly; the woman and the cripple had stopped eating and were watching him. They did not take their eyes away at once but gave him stare for stare. He sat down; without a word they began to eat once again.

The stew was good, and once he had begun Simpson ate heartily of it. The tacit devilry fell away from his surroundings as his hunger grew less, and his companions became no more than a middle-aged negress in a turban, a black boy pitifully deformed, and a beautiful child. He looked at his watch—he had not thought of the time for hours—and found that it was a little after noon. It was time that he bestirred himself and found lodgings.

"Is there a hotel?" he asked cheerfully. He had noticed that the islanders understood legitimate French, though they could not speak it.

"There is one," said the woman. She pushed away her plate and became suddenly dourly communicative. "But I doubt if the *propriétaire* would find room for m'sieu'."

"Has he so many guests, then?"

"But no. M'sieu' has forgotten the priest."

"The priest? What has he to do with it?"

"My son tells me that m'sieu' offended him, and the *propriétaire* is a good Catholic. He will close his house to you." She shaved a splinter to a point with a table knife and picked her teeth with it, both elbows on the table and her eyes on Simpson. "There is nowhere else to stay," she said. "Unless—here."

"I should prefer that," said Simpson—quickly, for reluctance and distrust were rising in him again. "But have you a room?"

She jerked a thumb over her shoulder at a door behind her.

"There," she said. Simpson waited for her to move, saw that she had no intention of doing so, and opened the door himself.

The room was fairly large, with two windows screened but unglazed; a canvas cot stood in one corner, a packing-box table and a decrepit chair in another. Like the kitchen it was surprisingly clean. He returned to his hostess, who showed no anxiety about his intentions.

"How much by the week?" he asked.

"Eight *gourdes*."

"And you will feed me for how much?"

"Fifteen *gourdes*."

"I will take it." He forced himself to decision again; had he hesitated he knew he would have gone elsewhere. The price also—less than four dollars gold—attracted him, and he could doubtless buy some furniture in the town. Moreover, experienced missionaries who had talked before the board had always emphasized the value of living among the natives.

"*B'en*," said the negress. She rose and emptied the remains from her plate into a tin pail, sponging the plate with a piece of bread.

"I have a trunk on the steamer," said Simpson. "The boy—can he——"

"He will go with you," the negress interrupted.

The cripple slid from his chair, scraped his plate and Simpson's, put on his battered straw hat, and shambled into the yard. Simpson followed.

He turned at the gate and looked back. The child had

toddled to the door and was standing there, holding on to the door-post. Inside, the shadow of the woman flickered across the close bars of bamboo.

## II

BUNSEN was standing on the jetty when they reached it, talking excitedly with a tall bowed man of fifty or so whose complexion showed the stippled pallor of long residence in the tropics.

"Here he is now!" Bunsen exclaimed as Simpson approached. "I was just getting anxious about you. Stopped at the hotel—you hadn't been there, they said. Port au Prince is a bad place to get lost in. Oh—this gentleman is our consul. Mr. Witherbee—Mr. Simpson."

Simpson shook hands. Witherbee's face was just a pair of dull eyes behind a ragged moustache, but there was unusual vigour in his grip.

"I'll see a lot of you, if you stay long," he said. He looked at Simpson more closely. "At least, I hope so. But where have you been? I was getting as anxious as Mr. Bunsen—afraid you'd been sacrificed to the snake or something."

Simpson raised a clerical hand, protesting. His amazing morning swept before his mind like a moving-picture film; there were so many things he could not explain even to himself, much less to these two Gentiles.

"I found lodgings," he said.

"Lodgings?" Witherbee and Bunsen chorused the word. "Where, for heaven's sake?"

"I don't know the name of the street," Simpson admitted. "I don't even know the name of my hostess. That"—indicating the cripple—"is her son."

"Good God!" Witherbee exclaimed. "Madame Picard! The *mamaloï*!"

"The—the what?" But Simpson had heard well enough.

"The *mamaloï*—the *mamaloï*—high priestess of voodoo."

"Her house is fairly clean," Simpson said. He was hardly aware of his own inconsequence. It was his instinct to defend any one who was attacked on moral grounds, whether they deserved the attack or not.

"Ye-es," Witherbee drawled. "I dare say it is. It's her



company that's unsavoury. Especially for a parson. Eh? What's the matter now?"

Simpson had flared up at his last words. His mouth set and his eyes burned suddenly. Bunsen, watching him coolly, wondered that he could kindle so; until that moment he had seemed but half alive. When he spoke his words came hurriedly—were almost unintelligible; yet there was some quality in his voice that compelled attention, affecting the senses more than the mind.

"Unsavoury company? That's best for a parson. 'I come not to bring the righteous but sinners to repentance.' And who are you to brand the woman as common or unclean? If she is a heathen priestess, yet she worships a god of some sort. Do you?" He stopped suddenly; the humility which men hated in him again blanketed his fanaticism. "It is my task to give her a better god—the only true God—Christ."

Bunsen, his legs wide apart, kept his eyes on the sea, for he did not want to let Simpson see him smiling, and he was smiling. Witherbee, who had no emotions of any sort, pulled his moustache farther down and looked at the clergyman as though he were under glass—a curiosity.

"So you're going to convert the whole island?" he said.

"I hope to make a beginning in the Lord's vineyard."

"Humph! The devil's game-preserve, you mean," Bunsen suddenly broke in.

"The devil's game-preserve, then!" Simpson was defiant.

"The ship calls here every other Saturday," was all Bunsen said to that. "You may need to know. I'll send your trunk ashore."

He stepped into the cripple's boat and started for the ship. Witherbee did not speak; Simpson, still raging, left him, strode to the end of the pier, and stood there, leaning on a pile.

His gust of emotion had left him; a not unfamiliar feeling of exaltation had taken its place. It is often so with the extreme Puritan type; control relaxed for however brief a moment sends their slow blood whirling, and leaves them light-headed as those who breathe thin air. From boyhood Simpson had been practised in control, until repression had become a prime tenet of his faith. The cheerful and generally innocent excursions of other men assumed in his mind the proportions of crime, of sin against the stern disciplining of

the soul which he conceived to be the goal of life. Probably he had never in all his days been so shocked as once when a young pagan had scorned certain views of his, saying: "There's more education—soul education, if you will have it—in five minutes of sheer joy than in a century of sorrow." It was an appalling statement, that—more appalling because he had tried to contradict it and had been unable to do so. He himself had been too eager to find his work in life—his pre-ordained work—ever to discover the deep truths that light-heartedness only can reveal; even when he heard his call to foreign missions—to Hayti, in particular—he felt no such felicity as a man should feel who has climbed to his place in the scheme of things. His was rather the sombre fury of the Covenanters—an intense conviction that his way was the only way of grace—a conviction that transcended reason and took flight into the realm of overmastering emotion—the only overmastering emotion, by the way, that he had ever experienced.

His choice, therefore, was in itself a loss of control and a dangerous one, for nothing is more perilous to sanity than the certainty that most other people in the world are wrong. Such conviction leads to a Jesuitical contempt of means; in cases where the Puritan shell has grown to be impregnable from the outside it sets up an internal ferment which sometimes bursts shell and man and all into disastrous fragments. Until old age kills them, the passions and emotions never die in man; suppress them how we will, we can never ignore them; they rise again to mock us when we think we are done with them forever. And the man of Simpson's type suffers from them most of all, for he dams against them all normal channels of expression.

Simpson, standing at the pier-end, was suffering from them now. His exaltation—a thing of a moment, as his fervour had been—had gone out of him, leaving him limp, uncertain of his own powers, of his own calling, even—the prey to the discouragement that precedes action, which is the deepest discouragement of all. Except for himself and Witherbee the pier was deserted; behind him the filthy town slept in its filth. Four buzzards wheeled above it, gorged and slow; the harbour lay before him like a green mirror, so still that the ship was reflected in it down to the last rope-yarn. Over all, the sun, colourless and furnace-hot, burned in a sky of steel. There

was insolence in the scorched slopes that shouldered up from the bay, a threatening permanence in the saw-edged sky-line. The indifference of it all, its rock-ribbed impenetrability to human influence, laid a crushing weight on Simpson's soul, so that he almost sank to his knees in sheer oppression of spirit.

"Do you know much about Hayti?" asked Witherbee, coming up behind him.

"As much as I could learn from books." Simpson wanted to be angry at the consul—why he could not tell—but Witherbee's voice was so carefully courteous that he yielded perforce to its persuasion and swung around, facing him. Suddenly, because he was measuring himself against man and not against Nature, his weakness left him, and confidence in himself and his mission flooded back upon him. "As much as I could get from books." He paused. "You have lived here long?"

"Long enough," Witherbee answered. "Five years."

"You know the natives, then?"

"Can't help knowing them. There are quite a lot of them, you see, and there's almost no one else. Do you know negroes at all?"

"Very little."

"You'd better study them a bit before you—before you do anything you have it in mind to do—the Haytian negro in particular. They're not like white men, you know."

"Like children, you mean?"

"Like some children. I'd hate to have them for nephews and nieces."

"Why?"

"We-ell"—Witherbee, looking sidelong at Simpson, bit off the end of a cigar—"a number of reasons. They're superstitious, treacherous, savage, cruel, and—worst of all—emotional. They've gone back. They've been going back for a hundred years. The West Coast—I've been there—is not so bad as Hayti. It's never been anything else than what it is now, you see, and if it moves at all it must move forward. There's nothing awful about savagery when people have never known anything else. Hayti has. You know what the island used to be before Desalines."

"I've read. But just what do you mean by West Coast savagery—here?"

"Snake-worship. Voodoo." Witherbee lit the cigar. "Human sacrifice."

"And the Roman Church does nothing!" There was exultation in Simpson's voice. His distrust of the Roman Church had been aggravated by his encounter with the black priest that morning.

"The Roman Church does what it can. It's been unfortunate in its instruments. Especially unfortunate now."

"Father Antoine?"

"Father Antoine. You met him?"

"This morning. A brute, and nothing more."

"Just that." Witherbee let a mouthful of smoke drift into the motionless air. "It's curious," he said.

"What is?"

"Father Antoine will make it unpleasant for you. He may try to have you knifed, or something."

"Impossible!"

"Not at all. Human life is worth nothing here. No wonder—it's not really worth living. But you're safe enough, and that's the curious thing."

"Why am I safe?"

"Because your landlady is who she is." Witherbee glanced over his shoulder, and, although they were the only people on the pier, from force of habit he dropped his voice. "The *mamaloï* has more power than the Church." He straightened and looked out toward the ship. "Here's her idiot with your trunk. My office is the first house on the left after you leave the pier. Don't forget that."

He turned quickly and was gone before the cripple's boat had reached the landing.

### III

THE town, just stirring out of its siesta as Simpson followed the cripple through the streets, somehow reassured him. Men like Bunsen and Witherbee, who smiled at his opinions and remained cold to his rhapsodies, always oppressed him with a sense of ineffectuality. He knew them of old—knew them superficially, of course, for, since he was incapable of talking impersonally about religion, he had never had the chance to listen to the cool and yet often strangely mystical

opinions which such men hold about it. He knew, in a dim sort of way, that men not clergymen sometimes speculated about religious matters, seeking light from each other in long, fragmentary conversations. He knew that much, and disapproved of it—almost resented it. It seemed to him wrong to discuss God without becoming angry, and very wrong for laymen to discuss God at all. When circumstances trapped him into talk with them about things divine, he felt baffled by their silences and their reserves, seemed to himself to be scrabbling for entrance to their souls through some sort of a slippery, impenetrable casing; he never tried to enter through their minds, where the door stood always open. The trouble was that he wanted to teach and be listened to; wherefore he was subtly more at home among the ignorant and in such streets as he was now traversing than with educated men. He had been born a few decades too late; here in Hayti he had stepped back a century or so into the age of credulity. Credulity, he believed, was a good thing, almost a divine thing, if it were properly used; he did not carry his processes far enough to realize that credulity could never become fixed—that it was always open to conviction. A receptive and not an inquiring mind seemed to him the prerequisite for a convert. And black people, he had heard, were peculiarly receptive.

The question was, then, where and how to start his work. Hayti differed from most mission fields, for, so far as he knew, no one had ever worked in it before him. The first step was to cultivate the intimacy of the people, and that he found difficult in the extreme. He had one obvious channel of approach to them; when buying necessary things for his room, he could enter into conversation with the shopkeepers and the market-women, but this he found it difficult to do. They did not want to talk to him, even seemed reluctant to sell him anything; and when he left their shops or stalls, did not answer his "Au revoir." He wondered how much the priest had to do with their attitude. They had little also that he wanted—he shopped for a week before he found a gaudy pitcher and basin and a strip of matting for his floor. Chairs, bureaus, bookcases, and tables did not exist. He said as much to Madame Picard, and gathered from her growled response that he must find a

carpenter. The cripple, his constant companion in his first days on the island, took him to one—a gray old negro who wore on a shoe-string about his neck a pouch which Simpson thought at first to be a scapular, and whom age and his profession had made approachable. He was garrulous even; he ceased working when at length he understood what Simpson wanted, sat in his doorway with his head in the sun and his feet in the shade, and lit a pipe made out of a tiny cocoanut. Yes—he could build chairs, tables, anything m'sieu' wanted. There was wood also—black palm for drawer-knobs and cedar and mahogany and rosewood, but especially mahogany. An excellent wood, pleasant to work in and suave to the touch. Did they use it in the United States, he wondered?

"A great deal," answered Simpson. "And the San Domingo wood is the best, I believe."

"San Domingo—but yes," the carpenter said; "the Haytian also—that is excellent. Look!"

He led Simpson to the yard at the rear of his house and showed him half a dozen boards, their grain showing where the broad axe had hewed them smooth. Was it not a beautiful wood? And what furniture did m'sieu' desire?

Simpson had some little skill with his pencil—a real love for drawing was one of the instincts which his austere obsessions had crushed out of him. He revolved several styles in his mind, decided at length on the simplest, and drew his designs on a ragged scrap of wrapping paper, while the carpenter, leaning down from his chair by the door, watched him, smoking, and now and then fingering the leather pouch about his neck. Simpson, looking up occasionally to see that his sketch was understood, could not keep his eyes away from the pouch—whatever it was, it was not a scapular. He did not ask about it, though he wanted to; curiosity, he had heard, should be repressed when one is dealing with barbarians. But he knew that that was not his real reason for not asking.

"But it is easy," said the carpenter, picking up the paper and examining it. "And the seats of the chairs shall be of white hide, is it not?"

Simpson assented. He did not leave the shop at once, but remained seated on the threshold, following his usual policy of picking up acquaintances where he could.

"M'sieu' is a priest?" the old man asked, squinting at

him as he filled the cocoanut pipe again and thrust it between his ragged yellow teeth.

"Not a priest. A minister of the gospel."

"*Quoi?*" said the carpenter.

Simpson saw that he must explain. It was difficult. He had on the one hand to avoid suggesting that the Roman Church was insufficient—that denunciation he intended to arrive at when he had gained firmer ground with the people—and on the other to refrain from hinting that Haytian civilization stood in crying need of uplift. That also could come later. He wallowed a little in his explanation, and then put the whole matter on a personal basis.

"I think I have a message—something new to say to you about Christ. But I have been here a week now and have found none to listen to me."

"Something new?" the carpenter rejoined. "But that is easy if it is something new. In Hayti we like new things."

"No one will listen to me," Simpson repeated.

The carpenter reflected for a moment, or seemed to be doing so.

"Many men come here about sunset," he said. "We sit and drink a little rum before dark; it is good against the fever."

"I will come also," said Simpson, rising. "It is every evening?"

"Every evening." The carpenter's right hand rose to the pouch which was not a scapular and he caressed it.

"Au revoir," said Simpson suddenly.

"*Voir*," the carpenter replied, still immobile in his chair by the door.

Up to now a walk through the streets had been a nightmare to Simpson, for the squalor of them excited to protest every New England nerve in his body, and the evident hostility of the people constantly threatened his success with them. He had felt very small and lonely, like a man who has undertaken to combat a natural force; he did not like to feel small and lonely, and he did not want to believe in natural forces. Chosen vessel as he believed himself to be, thus far the island had successfully defied him, and he had feared more than once that it would do so to the end. He had compelled himself to frequent the markets, hoping always

that he would find in them the key to the door that was closed against him; he had not found it, and, although he recognized that three weeks was but a fractional moment of eternity, and comforted himself by quoting things about the "mills of God," he could not approach satisfaction with what he had accomplished so far.

His interview with the carpenter had changed all that, and on his way home he trod the Grand Rue more lightly than he had ever done. Even the cathedral, even the company of half-starved conscripts that straggled past him in the tail of three generals, dismayed him no longer, for the cathedral was but the symbol of a frozen Christianity which he need no longer fear, and the conscripts were his people—his—or soon would be. All that he had wanted was a start; he had it now, though he deplored the rum which would be drunk at his first meeting with the natives. One must begin where one could.

Witherbee, sitting in the window of the consulate, called twice before Simpson heard him.

"You look pretty cheerful," he said. "Things going well?"

"They've just begun to, I think—I think I've found the way to reach these people."

"Ah?" The monosyllable was incredulous though polite. "How's that?"

"I've just been ordering some furniture from a carpenter," Simpson answered. It was the first time since the day of his arrival that he had seen Witherbee to speak to, and he found it a relief to speak in his own language and without calculating the result of his words.

"A carpenter? Vieux Michaud, I suppose?"

"That's his name. You know him?"

"Very well." The consul tipped back his chair and tapped his lips with a pencil. "Very well. He's a clever workman. He'll follow any design you give him, and the woods, of course, are excellent."

"Yes. He showed me some. But he's more than a carpenter to me. He's more—receptive—than most of the natives, and it seems that his shop is a gathering place—a centre. He asked me to come in the evenings."

"And drink rum?" Witherbee could not resist that.



"Ye-es. He said they drank rum. I sha'n't do that, of course, but one must begin where one can."

"I suppose so," Witherbee answered slowly. The office was darkened to just above reading-light, and the consul's face was in the shadow. Evidently he had more to say, but he allowed a long silence to intervene before he went on. Simpson, imaging wholesale conversions, sat quietly; he was hardly aware of his surroundings.

"Don't misunderstand what I'm going to say," the consul began at length. Simpson straightened, on his guard at once. "It may be of use to you—in your work," he added quickly. "It's this. Somehow—by chance perhaps, though I don't think so—you've fallen into strange company—stranger than any white man I've ever known."

"I am not afraid of voodoo," said Simpson rather scornfully.

"It would be better if you were a little afraid of it. I am—and I know what I'm talking about. Look what's happened to you. There's the Picard woman—she's the one who had President Simon Sam under her thumb. Did you know he carried the symbols of voodoo next his heart? And now Michaud, who's her right hand and has been for years. Looks like deep water to me."

"I must not fear for my own body."

"That's not what I mean exactly, though I wish you were a little more afraid for it. It might save me trouble—possibly save our government trouble—in the end. But the consequences of letting voodoo acquire any more power than it has may be far-reaching."

"I am not here to give it more power." Simpson, thoroughly angry, rose to go. "It is my business to defeat it—to root it out."

"Godspeed to you in that"—Witherbee's voice was ironical. "But remember what I tell you. The Picard woman is subtle, and Michaud is subtle." Simpson had crossed the threshold, and only half heard the consul's next remark. "Voodoo is more subtle than both of them together. Look out for it."

Witherbee's warning did no more than make Simpson angry; he attributed it to wrong motives—to jealousy perhaps, to hostility certainly, and neither jealousy nor hostility

could speak true words. In spite of all that he had heard, he could not believe that voodoo was so powerful in the island; this was the twentieth century, he insisted, and the most enlightened country in the world was less than fifteen hundred miles away; he forgot that opinions and not figures number the centuries, and refused to see that distance had nothing to do with the case. These were a people groping through the dark; when they saw the light they could not help but welcome it, he thought. The idea that they preferred their own way of life and their own religion, that they would not embrace civilization till they were forced to do so at the point of benevolent bayonets, never entered his head. His own way of life was so obviously superior. He resolved to have nothing more to do with Witherbee.

When he returned to the carpenter's house at about six that evening he entered the council of elders that he found there with the determination to place himself on an equality with them. It was to his credit that he accomplished this feat, but it was not surprising for the humility of his mind at least was genuine. He joined in their conversation, somewhat stiffly at first, but perhaps no more so than became a stranger. Presently, because he saw that he could not refuse without offending his host, he conquered prejudice and took a little rum and sugar and water. It went to his head without his knowing it, as rum has a habit of doing; he became cheerfully familiar with the old men and made long strides into their friendship—or thought he did. He did not once mention religion to them at that first meeting, though he had to exercise considerable self-restraint to prevent himself from doing so.

On his way home he met Father Antoine not far from Michaud's door. The priest would have passed with his usual surly look if Simpson had not stopped him.

"Well?" Antoine demanded.

"Why should we quarrel—you and I?" Simpson asked.

"Can we not work together for these people of yours?"

"Your friends are not my people, heretic!" Father Antoine retorted. "Rot in hell with them!"

He plunged past Simpson and was gone down the darkling alley.

"You are late, m'sieu'," remarked Madame Picard as he

came into the kitchen and sat down in a chair near the cripple. Her manner was less rough than usual.

"I've been at Michaud's," he answered.

"Ah? But you were there this morning."

"He asked me to come this evening, when his friends came, madame. There were several there."

"They are often there," she answered. There was nothing significant in her tone, but Simpson had an uneasy feeling that she had known all the time of his visit to the carpenter.

"I met Father Antoine on the way home," he said.

"A bad man!" She flamed into sudden violence. "A bad man!"

"I had thought so." Her loquacity this evening was amazing. Simpson thought he saw an opening to her confidence and plunged in. "And he is a priest. It is bad, that. Here are sheep without a shepherd."

"*Quoi ?*"

"Here are many people—all good Christians." Simpson, eager and hopeful, leaned forward in his chair. His gaunt face with the down-drawn mouth and the hungry eyes—grown more hungry in the last three weeks—glowed, took on fervour; his hand shot out expressive fingers. The woman raised her head slowly, staring at him; more slowly still she seated herself at the table that stood between them. She rested her arms on it, and narrowed her eyelids as he spoke till her eyes glittered through the slits of them.

"All good Christians," Simpson went on; "and there is none to lead them save a black——" He slurred the word just in time. The woman's eyes flashed open and narrowed again. "Save a renegade priest," Simpson concluded. "It is wrong, is it not? And I knew it was wrong, though I live far away and came—was led—here to you." His voice, though it had not been loud, left the room echoing. "It was a real call." He whispered that.

"You are a Catholic?" asked Madame Picard.

"Yes. Of the English Catholic Church." He suspected that the qualifying adjective meant nothing to her, but let the ambiguity rest.

"I was not sure," she said slowly, "though you told the boy." Her eyes, velvet-black in the shadow upcast by the lamp, opened slowly. "There has been much trouble with

Father Antoine, and now small numbers go to mass or confession." Her voice had the effect of shrillness though it remained low; her hands flew out, grasping the table-edge at arms' length with an oddly masculine gesture. "He deserved that! To tell his *canaille* that I—that we—— He dared! But now—now—we shall see!"

Her voice rasped in a subdued sort of a shriek; she sprang up from her chair, and stood for the fraction of a second with her hands raised and her fists clinched. Simpson, puzzled, amazed, and a little scared at last, had barely time to notice the position before it dissolved. The child, frightened, screamed from the floor. "*Taisez-vous—taisez-vous, mon enfant. Le temps vient.*"

She was silent for a long time after that. Simpson sat wondering what she would do next, aware of an uncanny fascination that emanated from her. It seemed to him as though there were subterranean fires in the ground that he walked on.

"You shall teach us," she said in her usual monotone. "You shall teach us—preach to many people. No house will hold them all." She leaned down and caressed the child. "*Le temps vient, mon petit. Le temps vient.*"

Under Simpson's sudden horror quivered an eerie thrill. He mistook it for joy at the promised fulfilment of his dreams. He stepped to his own doorway and hesitated there with his hand on the latch.

"To many people? Some time, I hope."

"Soon." She looked up from the child; there was a snakiness in the angle of her head and neck. "Soon."

He opened the door, slammed it behind him, and dropped on tense knees beside his bed. In the kitchen the cripple laughed—laughed for a long time. Simpson's tightly pressed palms could not keep the sound from his ears.

#### IV

EACH night the gathering at Vieux Michaud's became larger; it grew too large for the house, and presently overflowed into the yard behind, where Michaud kept his lumber. Generally thirty or forty natives collected between six and seven in the evening, roosting on the piled boards or sitting

on the dusty ground in little groups, their cigarettes puncturing the blue darkness that clung close to the earth under the young moon. There were few women among them at first and fewer young men; Simpson, who knew that youth ought to be more hospitable to new ideas than age, thought this a little strange and spoke to Michaud about it.

"But they are my friends, m'sieu'," answered Michaud.

The statement might have been true of the smaller group that Simpson had first encountered at the carpenter's house; it was not true of the additions to it, for he was evidently not on intimate terms with them. Nor did he supply rum for all of them; many brought their own. That was odd also, if Simpson had only known it; the many *cantinas* offered attractions which the carpenter's house did not. That fact occurred to him at length.

"They have heard of you, m'sieu'—and that you have something new to say to them. We Haytians like new things."

Thus, very quietly, almost as though it had been a natural growth of interest, did Simpson's ministry begin. He stepped one evening to the platform that overhung the carpenter's backyard, and began to talk. Long study had placed the missionary method at his utter command, and he began with parables and simple tales which they heard eagerly. Purposely, he eschewed anything striking or startling in this his first sermon. It was an attempt to establish a sympathetic understanding between himself and his audience, and not altogether an unsuccessful one, for his motives were still unmingled. He felt that he had started well; when he was through speaking small groups gathered around him as children might have done, and told him inconsequent, wandering tales of their own—tales which were rather fables, folklore transplanted from another hemisphere and strangely crossed with Christianity. He was happy; if it had not been that most of them wore about their necks the leather pouches that were not scapulars he would have been happier than any man has a right to be. One of these pouches, showing through the ragged shirt of an old man with thin lips and a squint, was ripped at the edge, and the unmistakable sheen of a snake's scale glistened in the seam. Simpson could not keep his eyes from it.

He dared to be more formal after that, and on the next night preached from a text—the Macedonian cry, “Come over and help us.” That sermon also was effective: toward the end of it two or three women were weeping a little, and the sight of their tears warmed him with the sense of power. In that warmth certain of his prejudices and inhibitions began to melt away; the display of feelings and sensibilities could not be wicked or even undesirable if it prepared the way for the gospel by softening the heart. He began to dabble in emotion himself, and that was a dangerous matter, for he knew nothing whatever about it save that, if he felt strongly, he could arouse strong feeling in others. Day by day he unwittingly became less sure of the moral beauty of restraint, and ardours which he had never dreamed of began to flame free of his soul.

He wondered now and then why Madame Picard, who almost from the first had been a constant attendant at his meetings, watched him so closely, so secretly—both when he sat with her and the cripple at meals and at the carpenter’s house, where he was never unconscious of her eyes. He wondered also why she brought her baby with her, and why all who came fondled it so much and so respectfully. He did not wonder at the deference, almost the fear, which all men showed her—that seemed somehow her due. She had shed her taciturnity and was even voluble at times. But behind her volubility lurked always an inexplicable intensity of purpose whose cause Simpson could never fathom and was afraid to seek for. It was there, however—a nervous determination, not altogether alien to his own, which he associated with religion and with nothing else in the world. Religiosity, he called it—and he was not far wrong.

Soon after his first sermon he began little by little to introduce ritual into the meetings at Michaud’s, so that they became decorous; rum-drinking was postponed till after the concluding prayer, and that in itself was a triumph. He began to feel the need of hymns, and, since he could find in French none that had associations for himself, he set about translating some of the more familiar ones, mostly those of a militant nature. Some of them, especially “The Son of God goes forth to war,” leaped into immediate pop-

ularity and were sung two or three times in a single service. He liked that repetition; he thought it laid the groundwork for the enthusiasm which he aroused more and more as time went on, and which he took more pains to arouse. Nevertheless, the first time that his feverish eloquence brought tears and incoherent shoutings from the audience, he became suddenly fearful before the ecstasies which he had touched to life; he faltered, and brought his discourse to an abrupt end. As the crowd slowly quieted and reluctantly began to drift away there flashed on him with blinding suddenness the realization that his excitement had been as great as their own; for a moment he wondered if such passion were godly. Only for a moment, however; of course it was godly, as any rapture informed by religion must be. He was sorry he had lost courage and stopped so soon. These were an emotional and not an intellectual people—if they were to be reached at all, it must be through the channels of their emotions. Thus far he thought clearly, and that was as far as he did think, for he was discovering in himself a capacity for religious excitement that was only in part a reflex of the crowd's fervour, and the discovery quickened and adorned the memory of the few great moments of his life. Thus had he felt when he resolved to take orders; thus, although in a less degree, because he had been doubtful and afraid, had he felt when he heard the Macedonian cry from this West Indian island. He had swayed the crowd also as he had always believed that he could sway crowds if only the spirit would burn in him brightly enough; he had no doubt that he could sway them again, govern them completely perhaps. That possibility was cause for prayerful and lonely consideration, for meditation among the hills, whence he might draw strength. He hired a pony forthwith and set out for a few days in the hinterland.

It was the most perilous thing he could have done. There is neither sanctity nor holy calm in the tropic jungle, nothing of the hallowed quietude that, in northern forests, clears the mind of life's muddle and leads the soul to God. There lurks instead a poisonous anodyne in the heavy, scented air—a drug that lulls the spirit to an evil repose counterfeiting the peacefulness whence alone high thoughts can spring. In the North, Nature displays a certain restraint even in her

most flamboyant moods: the green fires of spring temper their sensuousness in chill winds, and autumn is rich in suggestion not of love, but of gracious age, having the aloof beauty of age and its true estimates of life. The perception of its loveliness is impersonal and leaves the line between the æsthetic and the sensuous clearly marked. Beneath a straighter sun the line is blurred and sometimes vanishes: no orchid-musk, no azure and distant hill, no tinted bay but accosts the senses, confusing one with another, mingling all the emotions in a single cup, persuading man that he knows good from evil as little as though he lived still in Eden. From such stealthy influences the man of rigid convictions is often in more danger than the man of no convictions at all, for rigid convictions rather often indicate inexperience and imperfect observation; experience, therefore—especially emotional experience—sometimes warps them into strange and hideous shapes.

Simpson did not find in the bush the enlightenment that he had hoped for. He did, however, anæsthetize his mind into the belief that he had found it. Returning, he approached Port au Prince by a route new to him. A well-beaten trail aroused his curiosity and he followed it into a grove of ceiba and mahogany. It was clear under foot, as no tropic grove uncared for by man can be clear; in the middle of it lay the ashes of a great fire, and three minaca-palm huts in good repair huddled almost invisible under the vast trees. The ground, bare of grass, was trodden hard, as though a multitude had stamped it down—danced it down, perhaps—and kept it bare by frequent use.

"What a place for a camp-meeting!" thought Simpson as he turned to leave it. "God's cathedral aisles, and roofed by God's blue sky."

His pony shied and whirled around, a long snake—a fer-de-lance—flowed across the path.

The desire to hold his services in the grove remained in his mind; the only reason he did not transfer them there at once was that he was not yet quite sure of his people. They came eagerly to hear him, they reflected his enthusiasm at his behest, they wept and praised God. Yet, underneath all his hopes and all his pride in what he had done ran a cold current of doubt, an undefined and indefinable fear of



something devilish and malign that might thwart him in the end.

He thrust it resolutely out of his mind.

## V

"I HAVE told your people—your *canaille*," said Father Antoine, "that I shall excommunicate them all."

The priest had been graver than his wont—more dignified, less volcanic, as though he was but the mouthpiece of authority, having none of it himself.

"They are better out of your Church than in it," Simpson answered.

Father Antoine trembled a little; it was the first sign he had given that his violent personality was still alive under the perplexing new power that had covered it.

"You are determined?" Simpson nodded with compressed lips. "Their damnation be on your head, then."

The priest stood aside. Simpson squeezed by him on the narrow sidewalk; as he did so, Antoine drew aside the skirts of his cassock.

From the beginning Simpson had preached more of hell than of heaven; he could not help doing so, for he held eternal punishment to be more imminent than eternal joy, and thought it a finer thing to scare people into heaven than to attract them thither. He took an inverted pleasure also in dwelling on the tortures of the damned, and had combed the minor prophets and Revelation for threatening texts to hurl at his congregation. Such devil-worship, furthermore, gave him greater opportunity for oratory, greater immediate results also; he had used it sometimes against his better judgment, and was not so far gone that he did not sometimes tremble at the possible consequences of its use. His encounter with the priest, however, had driven all doubts from his mind, and that evening he did what he had never done before—he openly attacked the Roman Church.

"What has it done for you?" he shouted, and his voice rang in the rafters of the warehouse where a hundred or so Negroes had gathered to hear him. "What has it done for you? You cultivate your ground, and its tithes take the food from the mouths of your children. Does the priest tell you of

salvation, which is without money and without price, for all—for all—for all? Does he live among you as I do? Does he minister to your bodies? Or your souls?"

There was a stir at the door, and the eyes of the congregation turned from the platform.

"Father Antoine!" shrieked a voice. It was Madame Picard's; Simpson could see her in the gloom at the far end of the hall and could see the child astride of her hip. "Father Antoine! He is here!"

In response to the whip of her voice there was a roar like the roar of a train in a tunnel. It died away; the crowd eddied back upon the platform. Father Antoine—he was robed, and there were two acolytes with him, one with a bell and the other with a candle—began to read in a voice as thundering as Simpson's own.

*"Excommunicado——"*

The Latin rolled on, sonorous, menacing. It ceased; the candle-flame snuffed out, the bell tinkled, there was the flash of a cope in the doorway, and the priest was gone.

"He has excommunicated you!" Simpson shouted, almost shrieked. "Thank God for that, my people!"

They faced him again; ecstatic, beside himself, he flung at them incoherent words. But the Latin, mysterious as magic, fateful as a charm, had frightened them, and they did not yield to Simpson immediately. Perhaps they would not have yielded to him at all if it had not been for Madame Picard.

From her corner rose an eerie chant in broken minors; it swelled louder, and down the lane her people made for her she came dancing. Her turban was off, her dress torn open to the breasts; she held the child horizontally and above her in both hands. Her body swayed rhythmically, but she just did not take up the swing of the votive African dance that is as old as Africa. Up to the foot of the platform she wavered, and there the cripple joined her, laughing as always. Together they shuffled first to the right and then to the left, their feet marking the earth floor in prints that overlapped like scales. She laid the baby on the platform, sinking slowly to her knees as she did so; as though at a signal the wordless chant rumbled upward from the entire building, rolled over the platform like a wave, engulfing the white man in its flood.

"Symbolism! Sacrifice!" Simpson yelled. "She offers all to God!"

He bent and raised the child at arm's length above his head. Instantly the chanting ceased.

"To the grove!" screamed the *mamaloï*. She leaped to the platform, almost from her knees it seemed, and snatched the child. "To the grove!"

The crowd took up the cry; it swelled till Simpson's ears ached under the impact of it.

"To the grove!"

Doubt assailed him as his mind—a white man's mind—rebelled.

"This is wrong," he said dully; "wrong."

Madame Picard's fingers gripped his arm. Except for the spasms of the talons which were her fingers she seemed calm.

"No, m'sieu'," she said. "You have them now. Atonement—atonement, m'sieu'. You have many times spoken of atonement. But they do not understand what they cannot see. They are behind you—you cannot leave them now."

"But—the child?"

"The child shall show them—a child shall lead them, m'sieu'. They must see a *théâtre* of atonement—then they will believe. Come."

Protesting, he was swept into the crowd and forward—forward to the van of it, into the Grand Rue. Always the thunderous rumble of the mob continued; high shrieks flickered like lightning above it; the name of Christ dinned into his ears from foul throats. On one side of him the cripple appeared; on the other strode the *mamaloï*—the child, screaming with fear, on her hip. A hymn-tune stirred under the tumult—rose above it.

*"Le fils de Dieu se va l'en guerre  
Son drapeau rouge comme sang."*

Wild quavers adorned the tune obscenely; the mob marched to it, falling into step. Torches came, flaming high at the edges of the crowd, flaming wan and lurid on hundreds of black faces.

*"Il va pour gagner sa couronne  
Qui est-ce que suit dans son train?"*

"A crusade!" Simpson suddenly shouted. "It is a crusade!"

Yells answered him. Somewhere a drum began, reverberating as though unfixed in space; now before them, now behind; now, it seemed, in the air. The sound was maddening. A swaying began in the crowd that took on cadence, became a dance. Simpson, his brain drugged, his senses perfervid, marched on in exultation. These were his people at last.

The drum thundered more loudly, became unbearable. They were clear of the town and in the bush at last; huge fires gleamed through the trees, and the mob spilled into the grove. The cripple and the *mamaloï* were beside him still.

In the grove, with the drums—more than one of them now—palpitating unceasingly, the dancing became wilder, more savage. In the light of the fire the *mamaloï* swayed, holding the screaming child, and close to the flames crouched the cripple. The hymn had given place to the formless chant, through which the minors quivered like the wails of lost souls.

The scales fell from Simpson's eyes. He rose to his full height and stretched out his arm, demanding silence; there was some vague hope in him that even now he might guide them. His only answer was a louder yell than ever.

It took form. Vieux Michaud sprang from the circle into the full firelight, feet stamping, eyes glaring.

"*La chèvre!*" he yelled. "*La chèvre sans cornes!*"

The drums rolled in menacing crescendo, the fire licked higher. All sounds melted into one.

"*La chèvre sans cornes!*"

The *mamaloï* tore the child from her neck and held it high by one leg. Simpson, seeing clearly as men do before they die, flung himself toward her.

The cripple's knife, thrust from below, went home between his ribs just as the *mamaloï's* blade crossed the throat of the sacrifice.

"So I signed the death-certificate," Witherbee concluded. "Death at the hands of persons unknown."

"And they'll call him a martyr," said Bunsen.

"Who knows?" the consul responded gravely. "Perhaps he was one."

# MARTIN GARRITY GETS EVEN

BY COURTNEY RILEY COOPER AND LEO. F. CREAGAN

*From American Magazine*

THE entrance of Martin Garrity, superintendent of the Blue Ribbon Division of the O. R. & T. Railroad, had been attended by all the niceties of such an occasion, when Martin, grand, handsome, and magnificent, arrived at his office for the day. True to form, he had cussed out the office boy, spoken in fatherly fashion to the trainmaster over the telephone about the lateness of No. 210, remarked to the stenographer that her last letter had looked like the exquisite tracks of a cow's hoof—and then he had read two telegrams. A moment later, white, a bit stooped, a little old in features, he had left the office, nor had he paused to note the grinning faces of those in his wake, those who had known hours before!

Home, and stumbling slightly as he mounted the steps of the veranda, he faced a person in screaming foulard and a red toque, Mrs. Jewel Garrity, just starting for the morning's assault upon the market. Wordlessly he poked forward the first of the telegrams as he pulled her within the hall and shut the door. And with bulging eyes Jewel read it aloud:

Chicago, April 30.

GARRITY,  
Montgomery City:

Effective arrival successor J. P. Aldrich must dispense your valuable services. Kindly forward resignation by wire confirming this telegram.

W. W. WALKER,  
Vice-President & General  
Manager.

"And who is this Walker person?" Jewel asked, with a vindictive gasp. "'Tis me that never heard of him. Why

should he sign hisself vice president and giniral manager, when the whole world knows Mr. Barstow, bless his soul, is the——”

“Will ye listen?” Martin bellowed with sorrowful asperity. “Somethin’s happened. And now:

GARRITY,  
Montgomery City.

Alabaster abound celebrity conglomerate commensurate constituency effective arrival successor. Meet me Planters Hotel St. Louis this P. M.  
LEMUEL C. BARSTOW.

And while Jewel gasped Martin went on:

“’Tis code it is, from Barstow. It says Walker’s taken his place—and I’m out.”

Mouth drawn at the corners, hand trembling slightly, Jewel reached for the message and stared blankly at the railroad code. Then silently she turned and thumped up the stairs. In a moment she was down again; the screaming foulard had given place to a house dress; the red toque had been substituted by a shawl. But the lips were drawn no longer—a smile was on them, and a soft hand touched Martin’s white cheek as she reached the door.

“’Tis me that’s goin’ to the cash-carry, Marty darlin’,” came quietly. “I never liked that high-toned market annyhow. About—about that other, Marty, me bye, ’tis all right, it is, it is. We can always start over again.”

Over again! It had opened the doors of memory for Martin Garrity as, at the window, he stared after her with eyes that saw in the portly, middle-aged figure a picture of other days, when the world had centred about a fluttering honour flag, which flew above a tiny section house at a bit of a place called Glen Echo, when the rotund form of Jewel Garrity was slender and graceful, when Martin’s freckled face was thinner and more engaging, and when——

Visions of the old days floated before him, days on the section with his crew of “snipes” back in the Honour Flag times. Memories returned to him, of blazing hours in the summer, when even the grease-lizards panted and died, when the heat rays curled in maddening serpent-like spirals before his glazed eyes.

And why? Why had he been willing to sacrifice, to work for wages pitiful indeed, compared to the emoluments of other lines of endeavour? Why had she, his Jewel, accepted the loneliness, the impoverishment of those younger days with light-heartedness? He never had thought of it before. Now, deposed, dethroned, defeated at the very pinnacle of his life, the answer came, with a force that brought a lump to his throat and a tear to his eyes. Why? Because they had loved this great, human, glistening thing of shining steel and thundering noise, loved it because the Blue Ribbon division had included the Blue Ribbon section, their section, which they had built together.

Now, all they had worked for, lived for, longed for, and enjoyed together had been taken away, without warning, without reason, and given to another! Martin groaned with the thought of it. Three hours later he kissed his Jewel good-bye, roaring at her because a tear stood in each eye—to cover the fact that tears were in his own. That night, still grim, still white, he faced Lemuel C. Barstow, former vice-president and general manager of the O. R. & T. in his hotel room in St. Louis. That person spoke with biting directness.

"Politics, Martin," came his announcement. "They shelved me because I wouldn't play the tricks of a clique that got into power before I could stop 'em. You were my pet appointee, so you went, too. It wasn't because we weren't efficient. They lifted the pin on me, and that meant you. So here we are. But"—and a fist banged on the table—"they're going to pay for it! This new crowd knows as much about railroading as a baby does about chess. I tried to tell that to the men with the money. They wouldn't listen. So I went to men who could hear, the Ozark Central. I'm to be the new president of that road."

"That wooden axle outfit?" Martin squinted. "Sure, Mr. Barstow, I'm not knockin' the new deal, or——"

"Never mind that." Lemuel C. Barstow smiled genially. "That's where your part of the job comes in. That's why I need you. But we'll let that go for the present. Go back to Montgomery City, turn over the reins to this new fish, who doesn't know an air brake from a boiler tube, and keep quiet until I send for you."

Then ensued two weeks of nothing to do but wait. Nothing to do but to pace the floor like some belligerent, red-faced caged animal, daring his Jewel to feel hurt because sneering remarks had been made about her husband's downfall. Two weeks—then came the summons.

"Careful now, Martin! No wild throws, remember!" Lemuel Barstow was giving the final instructions. "We've got a big job ahead. I've brought you down here because you have the faculty of making men think they hate you—then going out and working their heads off for you, because, well, to be frank, you're the biggest, blunderingest, hardest-working blusterer that I ever saw—and you're the only man who can pull me through. This road's in rotten shape, especially as concerns the roadbed. The steel and ties are all right, but the ballast is rotten. You've got to make it the best in Missouri, and you've got only eight months to do it in. So tear loose. Your job's that of special superintendent, with no strings on it. Pay no attention to any one but me. If you need equipment, buy it and tell the purchasing agent to go to the hot place. By March 1st, and no later, I want the track from St. Louis to Kansas City to be as smooth as a ballroom floor."

"And why the rush?"

"Just this: The O. R. & T. treated me like a dirty dog. I'm going to make 'em pay for it; I'm after my pound of flesh now! There's just one thing that road prizes above all else—it's St. Louis-Kansas City mail contracts. The award comes up again in March. The system that can make the fastest time in the government speed trials gets the plum. Understand?"

"I do!" answered Martin, with the first real enthusiasm he had known in weeks. "'Tis me budget I'll be fixin' up im-mejiate at once. Ye'll get action, ye will." He departed for a frenzied month. Then he returned at the request of President Barstow.

"You're doing wonderful work, Martin," said that official. "It's coming along splendidly. But—but—I understand there's a bit of a laugh going around among the railroad men about you."

"About me?" Garrity's chest bulged aggressively. "An' who's laughin'?"

"Nearly everybody in the railroad game in Missouri. They



say you let some slick salesman sting you for a full set of Rocky Mountain snow-fighting machinery, even up to a rotary snow plough. I——”

“Sting me?” Martin bellowed the words. “That I did not!”

“Good! I knew——”

“I ordered it of me own free will. And if annybody laughs——”

“But, Martin”—and there was pathos in the voice—“a rotary snow plough? On a Missouri railroad? Flangers, jull-ploughs, wedge ploughs—tunnel wideners—and a rotary? Here? Why—I—I thought better of you than that. We haven’t had a snow in Missouri that would require all of those things, not in the last ten years. What did they cost?”

“Eighty-three thousand, fi’hunnerd an’ ten dollars,” answered Martin gloomily. He *had* pulled a boner. Mr. Barstow figured on a sheet of paper.

“At three dollars a day, that would hire nearly a thousand track labourers for thirty days. A thousand men could tamp a lot of ballast in a month, Martin.”

“That they could, sir,” came dolefully. Then Garrity, the old lump in his throat, waited to be excused, and backed from the office. That rotary snow plough had been his own, his pet idea—and it had been wrong!

Gloomily he returned to Northport, his headquarters, there to observe a group of grinning railroad men gathered about a great, bulky object parked in front of the roundhouse. Behind it were other contraptions of shining steel, all of which Martin recognized without a second glance—his snow-fighting equipment, just arrived. Nor did he approach for a closer view. Faintly he heard jeering remarks from the crowd; then laughter. He caught the mention of his own name, coupled with derisive comment. His hands clenched. His red neck bulged. His big lungs filled—then slowly deflated; and Martin went slowly homeward, in silence.

“And is it your liver?” asked Jewel Garrity as they sat at dinner.

“It is not!” bawled Martin. He rose. He pulled his napkin from his chin with Garrity emphasis and dropped it in the gravy. He thumped about the table, then stopped.

One big freckled paw reached uncertainly outward and plunked with intended gentleness upon the woman's shoulder, to rest, trembling there, a second. Then silently Martin went on upstairs. For that touch had told her that it was—his heart!

A heart that ached with a throbbing sorrow which could not be downed as the summer passed and Martin heard again and again the reflexes brought about by the purchase of his snow ploughs. Vainly he stormed up and down the line of the Ozark Central with its thousands of labourers. Vainly he busied himself with a thousand intricacies of construction, in the hope of forgetfulness. None of it could take from his mind the fact that railroad men were laughing at him, that chuckling train-butchers were pointing out the giant machinery to grinning passengers, that even the railroad journals were printing funny quips about Barstow's prize superintendent and his mountain snow plough. Nor could even the news that Aldrich, over on the Blue Ribbon division, was allowing that once proud bit of rail to degenerate into an ordinary portion of a railroad bring even a passing cheer. They, too, were laughing! In a last doglike hope Martin looked up the precipitation reports. It only brought more gloom. Only four times in thirty years had there been a snowfall in Missouri that could block a railroad!

The summer crept into autumn; autumn to early winter, bringing with it the transformation of the rickety old Ozark Central to a smooth, well-cushioned line of gleaming steel, where the trains shot to and fro with hardly a tremor, where the hollow thunder of culvert and trestle spoke of sturdy strength, where the trackwalker searched in vain for loose plates or jutting joints; but to Garrity, it was only the fulfilment or the work of a mechanical second nature. December was gliding by in warmth and sunshine. January came, with no more than a hatful of snow, and once more Martin found himself facing the president.

"We'll win that contract, Martin!" It almost brought a smile to the superintendent's face. "I've just been over the road—on the quiet. We made eighty miles an hour with hardly a jolt!"

"Thankee, sir." A vague sense of joy touched Martin's aching heart—only to depart.

"By the way, I noticed when I went through Northport that you've still got that rotary where everybody can see it. I wish you'd move that stuff—behind the roundhouse, out of sight."

Then Martin, heavier at heart than ever, went back to Northport. There he said a quaking good-bye to his last hope—and executed the president's orders, trying not to notice the grins of the "goat" crew as they shunted the machinery into hiding. That night, after Jewel was asleep, and the cat outside had ceased yowling, Martin climbed stealthily out of bed and went on his knees, praying with all the fervour of his big being for snow. And the prayer was answered——

By the worst rain that a Missouri January had known in years, scattering the freshly tamped gravel, loosening the piles of trestles, sending Martin forth once more to bawl his orders with the thunder of the old days back at Glen Echo, even to leap side by side with the track labourers, a tamping bar in his big hands, that one more blow might be struck, one more impression made upon the giant task ahead.

January slid by; February went into the third week before the job was finished. Martin looked at the sky with hopeful eyes. It was useless. March the first—and Martin went into St. Louis to make his report, and to spend an uneasy, restless night with the president in his room at the hotel.

"It's only a few days off now"—they were in bed the next morning, finishing the conversation begun the night before—"and I want you to keep your eyes open every second! The mail marathon agreement reads that no postponement can be made on account of physical or mechanical obstacles. If a trestle should happen to go out—that would be our finish."

"I wish"—Martin rolled out of bed and groped for his shoes—"we'd been workin' with me old Blue Ribbon division. I know every foot o'——"

"Oh, chase the Blue Ribbon division! Every time I see you you've got something on your chest about it. Why, man, don't you know it's the Blue Ribbon division that I'm counting on! Aldrich has let it run down until it's worse than a hog trail. If they can make forty-five an hour on it, I'm crazy. You can't win mail contracts with that. So forget it. Anyhow, you're working for the Ozark Central now."

Martin nodded, then for a long moment crouched silent, humiliated, his thick fingers fumbling with the laces of his shoes. At last, with a sigh, he poked his shirt into his trousers and thumped across the room to raise the drawn shades.

He stared. He gulped. He yelled—with an exclamation of joy, of deliverance, of victory! The outside world was white! A blinding, swirling veil shrouded even the next building. The street below was like a stricken thing; the vague forms of the cars seemed to no more than crawl. Wildly Martin pawed for the telephone and bawled a number. Barstow sat up in bed.

"Snow!" he gasped. "A blizzard!"

"Order the snow ploughs!" Garrity had got the chief dispatcher, and was bawling louder than ever. "All of thim! Put an injine on each and keep thim movin'! Run that rotary till the wheels drop off!"

Then he whirled, grasping wildly at coat, hat, and overcoat.

"And now will ye laugh?" he roared, as he backed to the door. "Now will ye laugh at me snow plough?"

Twenty-four hours later, when trains were limping into terminals hours behind time, when call after call was going forth to summon aid for the stricken systems of Missouri, when double-headers, frost-caked wheels churning uselessly, bucked the drifts in a constantly losing battle; when cattle trains were being cut from the schedules, and every wire was loaded with the messages of frantic officials, someone happened to wonder what that big boob Garrity was doing with his snow ploughs. The answer was curt and sharp—there on the announcement board of the Union Station:

#### OZARK CENTRAL ALL TRAINS ON TIME

But Martin had only one remark to make, that it still was snowing. Noon of the third day came, and the Ozark Central became the detour route of every cross-Missouri mail train. Night, and Martin Garrity, snow-crusted, his face cut and cracked by the bite of wind and the sting of splintered, wind-driven ice, his head aching from loss of sleep, but his heart thumping with happiness, took on the serious business of moving every St. Louis-Kansas City passenger and express train, blinked vacuously when someone called him a wizard.

Railroad officials gave him cigars, and slapped him on his snow-caked shoulders. He cussed them out of the way. The telephone at Northport clanged and sang with calls from President Barstow; but Martin only waved a hand in answer as he ground through with the rotary.

"Tell him to send me tilegrams!" he blustered. "Don't he know I'm busy?"

Twelve hours more. The snow ceased. The wind died. Ten miles out of Kansas City Martin gave the homeward-bound order for Northport, then slumped weakly into a corner. Five minutes before he had heard the news—news that hurt. The O. R. & T., fighting with every available man it could summon, had partially opened its line, with the exception of one division, hopelessly snowed under—his old, his beloved Blue Ribbon.

"'Tis me that would have kept 'er open," he mused bitterly. "And they fired me!"

He nodded and slept. He awoke—and he said the same thing again. He reached Northport, late at night, to roar at Jewel and the hot water she had heated for his frost-bitten feet—then to hug her with an embrace that she had not known since the days when her Marty wore a red undershirt.

"And do ye be hearin'?" she asked. "The Blue Ribbon's tied up! Not a wheel——"

"Will ye shut up?" Martin suddenly had remembered something. The mail test! Not forty-eight hours away! He blinked. One big hand smacked into the other. "The pound of flesh!" he bellowed. "Be gar! The pound of flesh!"

"And what are ye talkin'——"

"Woman, shut up," said Martin Garrity. "'Tis me that's goin' to bed. See that I'm not disturbed. Not even for Mr. Barstow."

"That I will," said Jewel—but that she didn't. It was Martin himself who answered the pounding on the door four hours later, then, in the frigid dining room, stared at the message which the chief dispatcher had handed him:

GARRITY, NORTHPORT: If line is free of snow assemble all snow-fighting equipment and necessary locomotives to handle same, delivering same fully equipped and manned with your own force to Blue Ribbon Division

O. R. & T. Accompany this equipment personally to carry out instructions as I would like to have them carried out. Everything depends on your success or failure to open this line.

LEMUEL C. BARSTOW.

So! He was to make the effort; but if he failed that mail contract came automatically to the one road free to make the test, the Ozark Central! That was what Barstow meant! Make the effort, appear to fight with every weapon, that the O. R. & T. might have no claim in the future of unfairness—but to fail! Let it be so! The O. R. & T. had broken his heart. Now, at last, his turn had come!

He turned to the telephone and gave his orders. Then up the stairs he clambered and into his clothes. Jewel snorted and awoke.

"Goo'by!" roared Martin as he climbed into his coat. "They've sent for me to open the Blue Ribbon."

"And have they?" Jewel sat up, her eyes beaming. "I'd been wishin' it—and ye'll do it, Marty; I've been thinkin' about the old section snowed under—and all the folks we knew——"

"Will ye shut up?" This was something Martin did not want to hear. Out of the house he plumped, to the waiting double-header of locomotives attached to the rotary, and the other engines, parked on the switches, with their wedge ploughs, jull-ploughs, flangers, and tunnel wideners. The "high-ball" sounded. At daybreak, boring his way through the snow-clogged transfer at Missouri City, Martin came out upon the main line of the O. R. & T.—and to his duty of revenge.

On they went, a slow, deliberate journey, steam hissing, black smoke curling, whistles tooting, wheels crunching, as the rotary bucked the bigger drifts and the smaller ploughs eliminated the slighter raises, a triumphant procession toward that thing which Martin knew he could attack with all the seeming ferocity of desperation and yet fail—the fifty-foot thickness of Bander Cut.

Face to face, in the gaunt sun of early morning he saw it—a little shack, half covered with snow, bleak and forbidding in its loneliness, yet all in all to the man who stared at it with eyes suddenly wistful—his little old section house, where once the honour flag had flown.

He gulped. Suddenly his hand tugged at the bell cord. Voices had come from without, they were calling his name! He sought the door, then gulped again. The steps and platform of his car were filled with eager, homely-faced men, men he had known in other days, his old crew of section "snipes."

All about him they crowded; Martin heard his voice answering their queries, as though someone were talking far away. His eyes had turned back to that section house, seeking instinctively the old flag, his flag. It spoke for a man who gave the best that was in him, who surpassed because he worked with his heart and with his soul in the every task before him. But the flag was not there. The pace had not been maintained. Then the louder tones of a straw boss called him back:

"You'll sure need that big screw and all the rest of them babies, Garrity. That ole Bander Cut's full to the sky—and Sni-a-bend Hill! Good-night! But you'll make 'er. You've got to, Garrity; we've made up a purse an' bet it down in Montgomery that you'll make 'er!"

Martin went within and the crew waited for a high-ball order that did not come. In his private car, alone, Martin Garrity was pacing the floor. The call of the old division, which he had loved and built, was upon him, swaying him with all the force of memory.

"I guess we could sell the flivver——" he was repeating. "Then I've got me diamond . . . and Jewel . . . she's got a bit, besides what we've saved bechune us. And he'll win the test, anyhow . . . they'll never beat him over this division . . . if I give him back what I've earned . . . and if he wins anyhow——"

Up ahead they still waited. Fifteen minutes. Twenty. At last a figure appeared in the cab of the big rotary, looking for a last time at that bleak little section house and the bare flagpole. Then:

"Start 'er up and give 'er hell!"

Martin was on the job once more, while outside his old section snipes cheered, and reminded him that their hopes and dreams for a division still beloved in spite of a downfall rested upon his shoulders. The whistles screamed. The bells clanged. Smoke poured from the stacks of the double-header, and the freshening sun, a short time later, glinted

upon the white-splotched equipment, as the great auger, followed by its lesser allies, bored into the mass of snow at Bander Cut.

Hours of backing and filling, of retreats and attacks, hours in which there came, time after time, the opportunity to quit. But Martin did not give the word. Out the other side they came, the steam shooting high, and on toward the next obstacle, the first of forty, lesser and greater, which lay between them and Montgomery City.

Afternoon . . . night. Still the crunching, whining roar of the rotary as it struck the icy stretches fought against them in vain, then retreated until pick and bar and dynamite could break the way for its further attack. Midnight, and one by one the exhausted crew approached the white-faced, grim-lipped man who stood tense and determined in the rotary cab. One by one they asked the same question:

"Hadn't we better tie up for the night?"

"Go on! D'ye hear me? Go on! What is it ye are, annyhow, a bunch of white-livered cowards that ye can't work without rest?"

The old, dynamic, bulldozing force, the force that had made men hate Martin Garrity only to love him, had returned into its full power, the force that had built him from a section snipe to the exalted possessor of the blue pennon which once had fluttered from that flagpole, was again on the throne, fighting onward to the conclusion of a purpose, no matter what it might wreck for him personally, no matter what the cost might be to him in the days to come. He was on his last job—he knew that. The mail contract might be won a thousand times over, but there ever would rest the stigma that he had received a telegram which should have been plain to him, and that he had failed to carry out its hidden orders. But with the thought of it Martin straightened, and he roared anew the message which carried tired, aching men through the night:

"Go on! Go on! What's stoppin' ye? Are ye going to let these milk-an'-water fellys over here say that ye tried and quit?"

Early morning—and there came Sni-a-bend Hill, with the snow packed against it in a new plane which obliterated the



railroad as though it had never been there. Hot coffee came from the containers, sandwiches from the baskets, and the men ate and drank as they worked—all but Garrity. This was the final battle, and with it came his battle cry:

"Keep goin'! This is the tough one—we've got to go on—we've got to go on!"

And on they went. The streaking rays of dawn played for a moment upon an untroubled mound of white, smooth and deep upon the eastern end of Sni-a-bend. Then, as though from some great internal upheaval, the mass began to tremble. Great heaps of snow broke from their place and tumbled down the embankment. From farther at the rear, steam, augmented by the vapours of melting snow and the far-blown gushes of spitting smoke, hissed upward toward the heights of the white-clad hill. Then a bulging break—the roar of machinery, and a monster came grinding forth, forcing its way hungrily onward, toward the next and smaller contest. Within the giant auger a man turned to Garrity.

"Guess it's over, Boss. They said up at Glen Echo——"

A silent nod. Then Garrity turned, and reaching into the telegram-blank holder at the side of the cab, brought forth paper and an envelope. Long he wrote as the rotary clattered along, devouring the smaller drifts in steady succession, a letter of the soul, a letter which told of an effort that had failed, of a decision that could not hold. And it told, too, of the return of all that Martin had worked for—Mr. Barstow had been good to him, and he, Martin Garrity, could not take his money and disobey him. He'd pay him back.

Whistles sounded, shrieking in answer to the tooting of others from far away, the wild eerie ones of yard engines, the deeper, throatier tones of factories. It was the end. Montgomery City!

Slowly Martin addressed the envelope, and as the big bore came to a stop, evaded the thronging crowds and sought the railroad mail box. He raised the letter. . . .

"Mr. Garrity!" He turned. The day agent was running toward him. "Mr. Garrity, Mr. Barstow wants to see you. He's here—in the station. He came to see the finish."

So the execution must be a personal one! The letter was crunched into a pocket. Dimly, suddenly, Martin followed

the agent. As through a haze he saw the figure of Barstow, and felt that person tug at his sleeve.

"Come over here, where we can talk in private!" There was a queer ring in the voice and Martin obeyed. Then: "Shake, Old Kid!"

Martin knew that a hand was clasping his. But why?

"You made it! I knew you would. Didn't I tell you we'd get our pound of flesh?"

"But—but the contract——"

"To thunder with the contract!" came the happy answer of Barstow. "If you had only answered the 'phone, you wouldn't be so much in the dark. What do I care about mail contracts now—with the best two lines in Missouri under my supervision? Don't you understand? This was the hole that I had prayed for this O. R. & T. bunch to get into from the first minute I saw that snow. They would have been tied up for a week longer—if it hadn't been for us. Can't you see? It was the argument I needed—that politics isn't what counts—it's brains and doing things! Now do you understand? Well"—and Barstow stood off and laughed—"if I have to diagram things for you, the money interests behind the O. R. & T. have seen the light. I'll admit it took about three hours of telephoning to New York to cause the illumination; but they've seen it, and that's enough. They also have agreed to buy the Ozark Central and to merge the two. Further, they have realized that the only possible president of the new lines is a man with brains like, for instance, Lemuel C. Barstow, who has working directly with him a general superintendent—and don't overlook that general part—a *general* superintendent named Martin Garrity!"

# STRANGER THINGS

By MILDRED CRAM

From *Metropolitan Magazine*

WE WERE seated in the saloon of a small steamer which plies between Naples and Trieste on irregular schedule. Outside, the night was thickly black and a driving rain swept down the narrow decks.

"You Englishmen laugh at ghosts," the Corsican merchant said. "In my country, we are less pretentious. Frankly, we are afraid. You, too, are afraid, and so you laugh! A difference, it seems to me, which lies, not in the essence but in the manner."

Doctor Fenton smiled queerly. "Perhaps. What do any of us know about it, one way or the other? Ticklish business! We poke a little too far beyond our ken and get a shock that withers our souls. Cosmic force! We stumble forward, bleating for comfort, and fall over a charged cable. It may have been put there to hold us out—or in."

Aldobrandini, the Italian inventor, was playing cards with a German engineer. He lost the game to his opponent, and turning about in his chair, came into the conversation.

"You are talking about ghosts. I have seen them. Once in the Carso. Again on the campagna near Rome. I met a company of Cæsar's legionaries tramping through a bed of asphodels. The asphodels lay down beneath those crushing sandals, and then stood upright again, unharmed."

The engineer shuffled the cards between short, capable fingers. "Ghosts. Yes, I agree; there are such things. Created out of our subconscious selves; mirages of the mind; photographic spiritual projections; hereditary memories. There are always explanations."

Doctor Fenton poked into the bowl of his pipe with a broad

thumb. "Did any of you happen to know the English poet, Cecil Grimshaw? No? I'll tell you a story about him if you care to listen. A long story, I warn you. Very curious. Very suggestive. I cannot vouch for the entire truth of it, since I got the tale from many sources—a word here, a chance encounter there, and at last only the puzzling reports of men who saw Grimshaw out in Africa. He wasn't a friend of mine, or I wouldn't tell these things."

Aldobrandini's dark eyes softened. He leaned forward. "Cecil Grimshaw . . . We Latins admire his work more than that of any modern Englishman."

The doctor tipped his head back against the worn red velvet of the lounge. An oil lamp, swinging from the ceiling, seemed to isolate him in a pool of light. Outside, the invisible sea raced astern, hissing slightly beneath the driving impact of the rain.

I first heard of Grimshaw [the doctor began] in my student days in London. He was perhaps five years my senior, just beginning to be famous, not yet infamous, but indiscreet enough to get himself talked about. He had written a little book of verse, "Vision of Helen," he called it, I believe. . . . The oblique stare of the hostile Trojans. Helen coifed with flame. Menelaus. Love . . . Greater men than Grimshaw had written of Priam's tragedy. His audacity called attention to his imperfect, colourful verse, his love of beauty, his sense of the exotic, the strange, the unhealthy. People read his book on the sly and talked about it in whispers. It was indecent, but it was beautiful. At that time you spoke of Cecil Grimshaw with disapproval, if you spoke of him at all, or, if you happened to be a prophet, you saw in him the ultimate bomb beneath the Victorian literary edifice. And so he was.

I saw him once at the Alhambra—poetry in a top hat! He wore evening clothes that were a little too elaborate, a white camellia in his buttonhole, and a thick-lensed monocle on a black ribbon. During the entr'acte he stood up and surveyed the house from pit to gallery, as if he wanted to be seen. He was very tall and the ugliest man in England. Imagine the body of a Lincoln, the hands of a woman, the jaw and mouth of Disraeli, an aristocratic nose, unpleasant eyes,

and then that shock of yellow hair—hyacinthine—the curly locks of an insane virtuoso or a baby prodigy.

"Who is that?" I demanded.

"Grimshaw. The chap who wrote the book about naughty Helen. *La belle Hélène* and the shepherd boy."

I stared. Everyone else stared. The pit stopped shuffling and giggling to gaze at that prodigious monstrosity, and people in the boxes turned their glasses on him. Grimshaw seemed to be enjoying it. He spoke to someone across the aisle and smiled, showing a set of huge white teeth, veritable tombstones.

"Abominable," I said.

But I got his book and read it. He was the first Englishman to dare break away from literary conventions. Of course he shocked England. He was a savage æsthete. I read the slim volume through at one sitting; I was horrified and fascinated.

I met Grimshaw a year later. He was having a play produced at the Lyceum—"The Labyrinth"—with Esther Levenson as Simonetta. She entertained for him at her house in Chelsea and I got myself invited because I wanted to see the atrocious genius at close range. He wore a lemon-coloured vest and lemon-yellow spats.

"How d'you do?" he said, gazing at me out of those queer eyes of his. "I hear that you admire my work."

"You have been misinformed," I replied. "Your work interests me, because I am a student of nervous and mental diseases."

"Ah. Psychotherapy."

"All of the characters in your poem, 'The Vision of Helen,' are neurotics. They suffer from morbid fears, delusions, hysteria, violent mental and emotional complexities. A text-book in madness."

Grimshaw laughed. "You flatter me. I am attracted by neurotic types. Insanity has its source in the unconscious, and we English are afraid of looking inward." He glanced around the crowded room with an amused and cynical look. "Most of these people are as bad as my Trojans, Doctor Fenton. Only they conceal their badness, and it isn't good for them."

We talked for a few moments. I amused him, I think, by

my diagnosis of his Helen's mental malady. But he soon tired of me and his restless gaze went over my head, searching for admiration. Esther Levenson brought Ellen Terry over and he forgot me entirely in sparkling for the good lady—showing his teeth, shaking his yellow locks, bellowing like a centaur.

"The fellow's an ass," I decided.

But when "The Labyrinth" was produced, I changed my mind. There again was that disturbing loveliness. It was a story of the passionate Florence of Lorenzo the Magnificent, and Esther Levenson drifted through the four long acts against a background of Tuscan walls, scarlet hangings, oaths, blood-spilling, dark and terrible vengeance. Grimshaw took London by the throat and put it down on its knees.

Then for a year or two he lived on his laurels, lapping up admiration like a drunkard in his cups. Unquestionably, Esther Levenson was his mistress, since she presided over his house in Cheyne Walk. They say she was not the only string to his lute. A Jewess, a Greek poetess, and a dancer from Stockholm made up his amorous medley at that time. Scandalized society flocked to his drawing-room, there to be received by Simonetta herself, wearing the blanched draperies and tragic pearls of the labyrinth he had made for her. Grimshaw offered no apologies. He was the uncrowned laureate and kings can do no wrong. He was painted by the young Sargent, of course, and by the aging Whistler—you remember the butterfly's portrait of him in a yellow kimono leaning against a black mantel? I, for one, think he was vastly amused by all this fury of admiration; he despised it and fed upon it. If he had been less great, he would have been utterly destroyed by it, even then.

I went to Vienna, and lost track of him for several years. Then I heard that he had married a dear friend of mine—Lady Dagmar Cooper, one of the greatest beauties and perhaps the sternest prude in England. She wrote me, soon after that unbelievable mating: "I have married Cecil Grimshaw. I know you won't approve; I do not altogether approve myself. He is not like the men I have known—not at all *English*. But he intrigues me; there is a sense of power behind his awfulness—you see I know that he is awful! I think I will be able to make him look at things—I mean visible, material things—

my way. We have taken a house in town and he has promised to behave—no more Chelsea parties, no dancers, no yellow waistcoats and chrysanthemums. That was all very well for his 'student' days. Now that he is a personage, it will scarcely do. I am tremendously interested and happy. . . ."

Interested and happy! She was a typical product of Victoria's reign, a beautiful creature whose faith was pinned to the most unimportant things—class, position, a snobbish religion, a traditional morality and her own place in an intricate little world of ladies and gentlemen. God save us! What was Cecil Grimshaw going to do in an atmosphere of titled bores, bishops, military men, and cautious statesmen? I could fancy him in his new town house, struggling through some endless dinner party—his cynical, stone-gray eyes sweeping up and down the table, his lips curled in that habitual sneer, his mind, perhaps, gone back to the red-and-blue room in Chelsea, where he had been wont to stand astride before the black mantel, bellowing indecencies into the ears of witty modernists. Could he bellow any longer?

Apparently not. I heard of him now and then from this friend and that. He was indeed "behaving" well. He wrote nothing to shock the sensibilities of his wife's world—a few fantastic short stories, touched with a certain childish spirituality, and that was all. They say that he bent his manners to hers—a tamed centaur grazing with a milk-white doe. He grew a trifle fat. Quite like a model English husband, he called Dagmar "My dear" and drove with her in the Park at the fashionable hour, his hands crossed on the head of his cane, his eyes half closed. She wrote me: "I am completely happy. So is Cecil. Surely he can have made no mistake in marrying me."

You all know that this affectation of respectability did not last long—not more than five years; long enough for the novelty to wear off. The genius or the devil that was in Cecil Grimshaw made its reappearance. He was tossed out of Dagmar's circle like a burning rock hurled from the mouth of a crater; he fell into Chelsea again. Esther Levenson had come back from the States and was casting about for a play. She sought out Grimshaw and with her presence, her grace and pallor and seduction, lured him into his old ways. "The

leaves are yellow," he said to her, "but still they dance in a south wind. The altar fires are ash and grass has grown upon the temple floor—I have been away too long. Get me my pipe, you laughing dryad, and I will play for you."

He played for her and all England heard. Dagmar heard and pretended acquiescence. According to her lights, she was magnificent—she invited Esther Levenson to Broadenham, the Grimshaw place in Kent, nor did she wince when the actress accepted. When I got back to England, Dagmar was fighting for his soul with all the weapons she had. I went to see her in her cool little town house, that house so typical of her, so untouched by Grimshaw. And, looking at me with steady eyes, she said: "I'm sorry Cecil isn't here. He's writing again—a play—for Esther Levenson, who was Simonetta, you remember?"

I promised you a ghost story. If it is slow in coming, it is because all these things have a bearing on the mysterious, the extraordinary things that happened——

You probably know about the last phase of Grimshaw's career—who doesn't? There is something fascinating about the escapades of a famous man, but when he happens also to be a great poet, we cannot forget his very human sins—in them he is akin to us.

Not all you have heard and read about Grimshaw's career is true. But the best you can say of him is bad enough. He squandered his own fortune first—on Esther Levenson and the production of "The Sunken City"—and then stole ruthlessly from Dagmar; that is, until she found legal ways to put a stop to it. We had passed into Edward's reign and the decadence which ended in the war had already set in—Grimshaw was the last of the "pomegranate school," the first of the bolder, more sinister futurists. A frank hedonist. An intellectual voluptuary. He set the pace, and a whole tribe of idolaters and imitators panted at his heels. They copied his yellow waistcoats, his chrysanthemums, his eye-glass, his bellow. Nice young men, otherwise sane, let their hair grow long like their idol's and professed themselves unbelievers. Unbelievers in what? God save us! Ten years later most of them were wading through the mud of Flanders, believing something pretty definite——



One night I was called to the telephone by the Grimshaws' physician. I'll tell you his name, because he has a lot to do with the rest of the story—Doctor Waram, Douglas Waram—an Australian.

"Grimshaw has murdered a man," he said briefly. "I want you to help me. Come to Cheyne Walk. Take a cab. Hurry."

Of course I went, with a very clear vision of the future of Dagmar, Lady Cooper, to occupy my thoughts during that lurching drive through the slippery streets. I knew that she was at Broadenham, holding up her head in seclusion.

Grimshaw's house was one of a row of red brick buildings not far from the river. Doctor Waram himself opened the door to me.

"I say, this is an awful mess," he said, in a shocked voice. "The woman sent for me—Levenson, that actress. There's some mystery. A man dead—his head knocked in. And Grimshaw sound asleep. It may be hysterical, but I can't wake him. Have a look before I get the police."

I followed him into the studio, the famous Pompeian room, on the second floor. I shall never forget the frozen immobility of the three actors in the tragedy. Esther Levenson, wrapped in peacock-blue scarves, stood upright before the black mantel, her hands crossed on her breast. Cecil Grimshaw was lying full length on a brick-red satin couch, his head thrown back, his eyes closed. The dead man sprawled on the floor, face down, between them. Two lamps made of sapphire glass swung from the gilded ceiling. . . . Bowls of perfumed, waxen flowers. A silver statuette of a nude girl. A tessellated floor strewn with rugs. Orange trees in tubs. Cigarette smoke hanging motionless in the still, overheated air. . . .

I stooped over the dead man. "Who is he?"

"Tucker. Leading man in 'The Sunken City.' Look at Grimshaw, will you? We mustn't be too long——"

I went to the poet. The inevitable monocle was still caught and held by the yellow thatch of his thick brow. He was breathing slowly.

"Grimshaw," I said, touching his forehead, "open your eyes."

He did so, and I was startled by the expression of de-

spair in their depths. "Ah," he said, "it's the psychopathologist."

"How did this happen?"

He sat up—I am convinced that he had been faking that drunken sleep—and stared at the sprawling figure on the floor. "Tucker quarrelled with me," he said. "I knocked him down and his forehead struck against the table. Then he crawled over here and died. From fright, d'you think?" He shuddered. "Take him away, Waram, will you? I've got work to do."

Suddenly Esther Levenson spoke in a flat voice, without emotion: "It isn't true! He struck him with that silver statuette. Like this——" She made a violent gesture with both arms. "And before God in heaven, I'll make him pay for it. I will! I will! I will!"

"Keep still," I said sharply.

Grimshaw looked up at her. He made a gesture of surrender. Then he smiled. "Simonetta," he said, "you are no better than the rest."

She sobbed, ran over to him, and went down on her knees, twisting her arms about his waist. There was a look of distaste in Grimshaw's eyes; he stared into her distraught face a moment, then he freed himself from her arms and got to his feet.

"I think I'll telephone to Dagmar," he said.

But Waram shook his head. "I'll do that. I'm sorry, Grimshaw; the police will have to know. While we're waiting for them, you might write a letter to Mrs. Grimshaw. I'll see that she gets it in the morning."

I don't remember whether the poet wrote to Dagmar then or not. But surely you remember how she stayed by him during the trial—still Victorian in her black gown and veil, mourning for the hope that was dead, at least! You remember his imprisonment; the bitter invective of his enemies; the defection of his followers; the dark scandals that filled the newspapers, offended public taste, and destroyed Cecil Grimshaw's popularity in an England that had worshipped him!

Esther Levenson lied to save him. That was the strangest thing of all. She denied what she had told us that night of the tragedy. Tucker, she said, had been in love with her; he followed her to Grimshaw's house in Chelsea and quarrelled

violently with the poet. His death was an accident. Grimshaw had not touched the statuette. When he saw what had happened, he telephoned to Doctor Waram and then lay down on the couch—apparently fainted there, for he did not speak until Doctor Fenton came. Waram perjured himself, too—for Dagmar's sake. He had not, he swore, heard the actress speak of a silver statuette, or of revenge before God. . . . And since there was nothing to prove how the blow had been struck, save the deep dent in Tucker's forehead, Grimshaw was set free.

He had been a year in prison. He drove away from the jail in a cab with Doctor Waram, and when the crowd saw that he was wearing the old symbol—a yellow chrysanthemum—a hiss went up that was like a geyser of contempt and ridicule. Grimshaw's pallid face flushed. But he lifted his hat and smiled into the host of faces as the cab jerked forward.

He went at once to Broadenham. Years later, Waram told me about the meeting between those two—the centaur and the milk-white doe! Dagmar received him standing and she remained standing all during the interview. She had put aside her mourning for a dress made of some clear blue stuff, and Waram said that as she stood in the breakfast room, with a sun-flooded window behind her, she was very lovely indeed.

Grimshaw held out his hands, but she ignored them. Then Grimshaw smiled and shrugged his shoulders and said: "I have made two discoveries this past year: That conventionalized religion is the most shocking evil of our day, and that you, my wife, are in love with Doctor Waram."

Dagmar held her ground. There was in her eyes a look of inevitable security. She was mistress of the house, proprietor of the land, conscious of tradition, prerogative, position. The man she faced had nothing except his tortured imagination. For the first time in her life she was in a position to hurt him. So she looked away from him to Waram and confirmed his discovery with a smile full of pride and happiness.

"My dear fellow," Grimshaw shouted, clapping Waram on the back, "I'm confoundedly pleased! We'll arrange a divorce for Dagmar. Good heaven, she deserves a decent future. I'm not the sort for her. I hate the things she cares most about. And now I'm done for in England. Just to make it look conventional—nice, Victorian, *English*, you un-

derstand—you and I can go off to the Continent together while Dagmar's getting rid of me. There'll be no trouble about that. I'm properly dished. Besides, I want freedom. A new life. Beauty, without having to buck this confounded distrust of beauty. Sensation, without being ashamed of sensation. I want to drop out of sight. Reform? No! I am being honest."

So they went off together, as friendly as you please, to France. Waram was still thinking of Dagmar; Grimshaw was thinking only of himself. He swaggered up and down the Paris boulevards showing his tombstone teeth and staring at the women. "The Europeans admire me," he said to Waram. "May England go to the devil." He groaned. "I despise respectability, my dear Waram. You and Dagmar are well rid of me. I see I'm offending you here in Paris—you look nauseated most of the time. Let's go on to Switzerland and climb mountains."

Waram *was* nauseated. They went to Salvan and there a curious thing happened.

They were walking one afternoon along the road to Martigny. The valley was full of shadows like a deep green cup of purple wine. High above them the mountains were tipped with flame. Grimshaw walked slowly—he was a man of great physical laziness—slashing his cane at the tasselled tips of the crowding larches. Once, when a herd of little goats trotted by, he stood aside and laughed uproariously, and the goatherd's dog, bristling, snapped in passing at his legs.

Waram was silent, full of bitterness and disgust. They went on again, and well down the springlike coils of the descent of Martigny they came upon the body of a man—one of those wandering vendors of pocket-knives and key-rings, scissors and cheap watches. He lay on his back on a low bank by the roadside. His hat had rolled off into a pool of muddy water. Doctor Waram saw, as he bent down to stare at the face, that the fellow looked like Grimshaw. Not exactly, of course. The nose was coarser—it had not that Wellington spring at the bridge, nor the curved nostrils. But it might have been a dirty, unshaven, dead Grimshaw lying there. Waram told me that he felt a shock of gratification before he heard the poet's voice behind him: "What's this? A drunkard?" He shook his head and opened the dead man's

shirt to feel for any possible flutter of life in the heart. There was none. And he thought: "If this were only Grimshaw! If the whole miserable business were only done with."

"By Jove!" Grimshaw said. "The chap looks like me! I thought I was the ugliest man in the world. I know better . . . D'you suppose he's German, or Lombardian? His hands are warm. He must have been alive when the goat-herd passed just now. Nothing you can do?"

Waram stayed where he was, on his knees. He tore his eyes away from the grotesque dead face and fixed them on Grimshaw. He told me that the force of his desire must have spoken in that look because Grimshaw started and stepped back a pace, gripping his cane. Then he laughed. "Why not?" he said. "Let this be me. And I'll go on, with that clanking hardware store around my neck. It can be done, can't it? Better for you and for Dagmar. I'm not being philanthropic. I'm looking, not for a reprieve, but for release. No one knows this fellow in Salvan—he probably came up from the Rhone and was on his way to Chamonix. What d'you think was the matter with him?"

"Heart," Doctor Waram answered.

"Well, what d'you say? This pedlar and I are social outcasts. And there is Dagmar in England, weeping her eyes out because of divorce courts and more public washing of dirty linen. You love her. I don't! Why not carry this fellow to the *rochers*, to-night after dark? To-morrow, when I have changed clothes with him, we can throw him into the valley. It's a good thousand feet or more. Would there be much left of that face, for purposes of identification? I think not. You can take the mutilated body back to England and I can go on to Chamonix, as he would have gone." Grimshaw touched the pedlar with his foot. "Free."

That is exactly what they did. The body, hidden near the roadside until nightfall, was carried through the woods to the *rochers du soir*, that little plateau on the brink of the tremendous wall of rock which rises from the Rhone valley to the heights near Salvan. There the two men left it and returned to their hotel to sleep.

In the morning they set out, taking care that the proprietor of the hotel and the professional guide who hung about the village should know that they were going to attempt the de-

scent of the "wall" to the valley. The proprietor shook his head and said: "*Bonne chance, messieurs!*" The guide, letting his small blue eyes rest for a moment on Grimshaw's slow-moving hulk, advised them gravely to take the road. "The tall gentleman will not arrive," he remarked.

"Nonsense," Grimshaw answered.

They went off together, laughing. Grimshaw was wearing his conspicuous climbing clothes—tweed jacket, yellow suede waistcoat, knickerbockers, and high-laced boots with hob-nailed soles. His green felt hat, tipped at an angle, was ornamented with a little orange feather. He was in tremendous spirits. He bellowed, made faces at scared peasant children in the village, swung his stick. They stopped at a barber shop in the place and those famous hyacinthine locks were clipped. Waram insisted upon this, he told me, because the pedlar's hair was fairly short and they had to establish some sort of a tonsorial alibi. When the floor of the little shop was thick with the sheared "petals," Grimshaw shook his head, brushed off his shoulders, and smiled. "It took twenty years to create that visible personality—and behold, a Swiss barber destroys it in twenty minutes! I am no longer a living poet. I am already an immortal—half-way up the flowery slopes of Olympus, impatient to go the rest of the way.

"Shall we be off?"

"By all means," Waram said.

They found the body where they had hidden it the night before, and in the shelter of a little grove of larches Grimshaw stripped and then reclothed himself in the pedlar's coarse and soiled under-linen, the worn corduroy trousers, the flannel shirt, short coat, and old black velvet hat. Waram was astounded by the beauty and strength of Grimshaw's body. Like the pedlar, he was blonde-skinned, thin-waisted, broad of back.

Grimshaw shuddered as he helped to clothe the dead pedlar in his own fashionable garments. "Death," he said. "Ugh! How ugly. How terrifying. How abominable."

They carried the body across the plateau. The height where they stood was touched by the sun, but the valley below was still immersed in shadow, a broad purple shadow threaded by the shining Rhone.

"Well?" Waram demanded. "Are you eager to die? For this means death for you, you know."

"A living death," Grimshaw said. He glanced down at the replica of himself. A convulsive shudder passed through him from head to foot; his face twisted; his eyes dilated. He made a strong effort to control himself and whispered: "I understand. Go ahead. Do it. I can't. It is like destroying me myself. . . . I can't. Do it——"

Waram lifted the dead body and pushed it over the edge. Grimshaw, trembling violently, watched it fall. I think, from what Doctor Waram told me many years later, that the poet must have suffered the violence and terror of that plummet drop, must have felt the tearing clutch of pointed rocks in the wall face, must have known the leaping upward of the earth, the whine of wind in his bursting ears, the dizzy spinning, the rending, obliterating impact at last. . . .

The pedlar lay in the valley. Grimshaw stood on the brink of the "wall." He turned, and saw Doctor Waram walking quickly away across the plateau without a backward glance. They had agreed that Waram was to return at once to the village and report the death of "his friend, Mr. Grimshaw." The body, they knew, would be crushed beyond recognition—a bruised and broken fragment, like enough to Cecil Grimshaw to pass whatever examination would be given it. Grimshaw himself was to go through the wood to the highroad, then on to Finhaut and Chamonix and into France. He was never again to write to Dagmar, to return to England, or to claim his English property. . . .

Can you imagine his feelings—deprived of his arrogant personality, his fame, his very identity, clothed in another man's dirty garments, wearing about his neck a clattering pedlar's outfit, upon his feet the clumsy boots of a peasant? Grimshaw—the exquisite futurist, the daffodil, apostle of the æsthetic!

He stood for a moment looking after Douglas Waram. Once, in a panic, he called. But Waram disappeared between the larches, without, apparently, having heard. Grimshaw wavered, unable to decide upon the way to the highroad. He could not shake off a sense of loneliness and terror, as if he himself had gone whirling down to his death. Like a man who comes slowly back from the effects of ether, he

perceived, one by one, the familiar aspects of the landscape—the delicate flowers powdering the plateau, the tasselled larches on the slope, the lofty snow-peaks still suffused with rosy morning light. This, then, was the world. This clumsy being, moving slowly toward the forest, was himself—not Cecil Grimshaw but another man. His mind sought clumsily for a name. Pierre—no, not Pierre; too commonplace! Was he still fastidious? No. Then Pierre, by all means! Pierre Pilleux. That would do. Pilleux. A name suggestive of a good amiable fellow, honest and slow. When he got down into France he would change his identity again—grow a beard, buy some decent clothes. A boulevardier . . . gay, perverse, witty. . . . The thought delighted him and he hurried through the forest, anxious to pass through Salvan before Doctor Waram got there. He felt extraordinarily light and exhilarated now, intoxicated, vibrant. His spirit soared; almost he heard the rushing of his old self forward toward some unrecognizable and beautiful freedom.

When he struck the road the sun was high and it was very hot. Little spirals of dust kicked up at his heels. He was not afraid of recognition. Happening to glance at his hands, he became aware of their whiteness, and stooping, rubbed them in the dust.

Then a strange thing happened. Another herd of goats trotted down from the grassy slopes and spilled into the roadway. And another dog with lolling tongue and wagging tail wove in and out, shepherding the little beasts. They eddied about Grimshaw, brushing against him, their moonstone eyes full of a vague terror of that barking guardian at their heels. The dog drove them ahead, circled, and with a low whine came back to Grimshaw, leaping up to lick his hand.

Grimshaw winced, for he had never had success with animals. Then, with a sudden change of mood, he stooped and caressed the dog's head.

"A good fellow," he said in French to the goatherd.

The goatherd looked at him curiously. "Not always," he answered. "He is an unpleasant beast with most strangers. For you, he seems to have taken a fancy. . . . What have you got there—any two-bladed knives?"



Grimshaw started and recovered himself with: "Knives. Yes. All sorts."

The goatherd fingered his collection, trying the blades on his broad thumb.

"You come from France," he said.

Grimshaw nodded. "From Lyons."

"I thought so. You speak French like a gentleman."

Grimshaw shrugged. "That is usual in Lyons."

The peasant paid for the knife he fancied, placing two francs in the poet's palm. Then he whistled to the dog and set off after his flock. But the dog, whining and trembling, followed Grimshaw, and would not be shaken off until Grimshaw had pelted him with small stones. I think the poet was strangely flattered by this encounter. He passed through Salvan with his head in the air, challenging recognition. But there was no recognition. The guide who had said "The tall monsieur will not arrive" now greeted him with a fraternal: "How is trade?"

"Very good, thanks," Grimshaw said.

Beyond the village he quickened his pace, and easing the load on his back by putting his hands under the leather straps, he swung toward Finhaut. Behind him he heard the faint ringing of the church bells in Salvan. Waram had reported the "tragedy." Grimshaw could fancy the excitement—the priest hurrying toward the "wall" with his crucifix in his hands; the barber, a-quiver with morbid excitement; the stolid guide, not at all surprised, rather gratified, preparing to make the descent to recover the body of that "tall monsieur" who had, after all, "arrived." The telegraph wires were already humming with the message. In a few hours Dagmar would know.

He laughed aloud. The white road spun beneath him. His hands, pressed against his body by the weight of the leather straps, were hot and wet; he could feel the loud beating of his heart.

His senses were acute; he had never before felt with such gratification the warmth of the sun or known the ecstasy of motion. He saw every flower in the roadbank, every small glacial brook, every new conformation of the snow clouds hanging above the ragged peaks of the Argentières. He sniffed with delight the pungent wind from off the glaciers,

the short, warm puffs of grass-scented air from the fields in the Valley of Trient. He noticed the flight of birds, the lazy swinging of pine boughs, the rainbow spray of waterfalls. Once he shouted and ran, mad with exuberance. Again he flung himself down by the roadside and, lying on his back, sang outrageous songs and laughed and slapped his breast with both hands.

That night he came to Chamonix and got lodging in a small hotel on the skirts of the town. His spirits fell when he entered the room. He put his pedlar's pack on the floor and sat down on the narrow bed, suddenly conscious of an enormous fatigue. His feet burned, his legs ached, his back was raw where the heavy pack had rested. He thought: "What am I doing here? I have nothing but the few hundred pounds Waram gave me. I'm alone. Dead and alive."

He scarcely looked up when the door opened and a young girl came in, carrying a pitcher of water and a coarse towel. She hesitated and said rather prettily: "You'll be tired, perhaps?"

Grimshaw felt within him the tug of the old personality. He stared at her, suddenly conscious that she was a woman and that she was smiling at him. Charming, in her way. Bare arms. A little black bodice laced over a white waist. Straight blonde hair, braided thickly and twisted around her head. A peasant, but pretty. . . . You see, his desire was to frighten her, as he most certainly would have frightened her had he been true to Cecil Grimshaw. But the impulse passed, leaving him sick and ashamed. He heard her saying: "A sad thing occurred to-day down the valley. A gentleman. . . . Salvan . . . a very famous gentleman. . . . And they have telegraphed his wife. . . . I heard it from Simon Ravanel. . . . It seems that the gentleman was smashed to bits—*brisé en morceau*. *Épouvantable, n'est ce pas?*"

Grimshaw began to tremble. "Yes, yes," he said irritably. "But I am tired, little one. Go out, and shut the door!"

The girl gave him a startled glance, frightened at last, but for nothing more than the lost look in his eyes. He raised his arms, and she fled with a little scream.

Grimshaw sat for a moment staring at the door. Then

with a violent gesture he threw himself back on the bed, buried his face in the dirty pillow and wept as a child weeps, until, just before dawn, he fell asleep. . . .

As far as the public knows, Cecil Grimshaw perished on the "wall"—perished and was buried at Broadenham beneath a pyramid of chrysanthemums. Perished, and became an English immortal—his sins erased by his unconscious sacrifice. Perished, and was forgiven by Dagmar. Yet hers was the victory—he belonged to her at last. She had not buried his body at Broadenham, but she had buried his work there. He could never write again. . . .

During those days of posthumous whitewashing he read the papers with a certain contemptuous eagerness. Some of them he crumpled between his hands and threw away. He hated his own image, staring balefully from the first page of the illustrated reviews. He despised England for honouring him. Once, happening upon a volume of the "Vision of Helen"—the first edition illustrated by Beardsley—in a book-stall at Aix-les-Bains, he read it from cover to cover.

"Poor stuff," he said to the bookseller, tossing it down again. "Give me 'Arsène Lupin'." And he paid two sous for a paper-covered, dog-eared, much-thumbed copy of the famous detective story, not because he intended to read it, but in payment for his hour of disillusionment. Then he slung his pack over his shoulders and tramped out into the country. He laughed aloud at the thought of Helen and her idolaters. A poetic hoax. Overripe words. Seductive sounds. Nonsense!

"Surely I can do better than that to-day," he thought.

He saw two children working in a field, and called to them.

"If you will give me a cup of cold water," he said, "I'll tell you a story."

"Gladly, monsieur."

The boy put down his spade, went to a brook which threaded the field and came back with an earthenware jug full to the brim. The little girl stared gravely at Grimshaw while he drank. Grimshaw wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

"What story shall it be?" he demanded.

The little girl said quickly: "The black king and the white princess and the beast who lived in the wood."

"Not that one," the boy cried. "Tell us about a battle."

"I will sing about life," Grimshaw said.

It was hot in the field. A warm, sweet smell rose from the spaded earth and near by the brook rustled through the grass like a beautiful silver serpent. Grimshaw sat cross-legged on the ground and words spun from his lips—simple words. And he sang of things he had recently learned—the gaiety of birds, the strength of his arms, the scent of dusk, the fine crystal of a young moon, wind in a field of wheat. . . .

At first the children listened. Then, because he talked so long, the little girl leaned slowly over against his shoulder and fell asleep, while the boy fingered the knives, jangled the key-rings, clipped grass stalks with the scissors, and wound the watches one after the other. The sun was low before Grimshaw left them. "When you are grown up," he said, "remember that Pierre Pilleux sang to you of life."

"*Oui, monsieur*," the boy said politely. "But I should like a watch."

Grimshaw shook his head. "The song is enough."

Thereafter he sang to any one who would listen to him. I say that he sang—I mean, of course, that he spoke his verses; it was a minstrel's simple improvisation. But there are people in the villages of southern France who still recall that ungainly, shambling figure. He had grown a beard; it crinkled thickly, hiding his mouth and chin. He laughed a great deal. He was not altogether clean. And he slept wherever he could find a bed—in farmhouses, cheap hotels, haylofts, tables, open fields. Waram's few hundred pounds were gone. The poet lived by his wits and his gift of song. And for the first time in his remembrance he was happy.

Then one day he read in *Le Matin* that Ada Rubenstein was to play "The Labyrinth" in Paris. Grimshaw was in Poitiers. He borrowed three hundred francs from the proprietor of a small café in the Rue Carnot, left his pack as security, and went to Paris. Can you imagine him in the theatre—it was the Odéon, I believe—conscious of curious, amused glances—a peasant, bulking conspicuously in that scented auditorium?

When the curtain rose, he felt again the familiar pain of creation. A rush of hot blood surged around his heart. His temples throbbed. His eyes filled with tears. Then the

flood receded and left him trembling with weakness. He sat through the rest of the performance without emotion of any sort. He felt no resentment, no curiosity.

This was the last time he showed any interest in his old existence. He went back to Poitiers, and then took to the road again. People who saw him at that time have said that there was always a pack of dogs at his heels. Once a fashionable spaniel followed him out of Lyons and he was arrested for theft. You understand, he never made any effort to attract the little fellows—they joined on, as it were, for the journey. And it was a queer fact that after a few miles they always whined, as if they were disappointed about something, and turned back. . . .

He finally heard that Dagmar had married Waram. She had waited a decent interval—Victorian to the end! A man who happened to be in Marseilles at the time told me that “that vagabond poet, Pilleux, appeared in one of the cafés, roaring drunk, and recited a marriage poem—obscene, vicious, terrific. A crowd came in from the street to listen. Some of them laughed. Others were frightened. He was an ugly brute—well over six feet tall, with a blonde beard, a hooked nose, and a pair of eyes that saw beyond reality. He was fascinating. He could turn his eloquence off and on like a tap. He sat in a drunken stupor, glaring at the crowd, until someone shouted: “*Eh bien, Pilleux*—you were saying?” Then the deluge! He had a peasant’s acceptance of the elemental facts of life—it was raw, that hymn of his! The women of the streets who had crowded into the café listened with a sort of terror; they admired him. One of them said: “Pilleux’s wife betrayed him.” He lifted his glass and drank. “No, *ma petite*,” he said politely, “she buried me.”

That night his pack was stolen from him. He was too drunk to know or to care. They say that he went from café to café, paying for wine with verse, and getting it, too! At his heels a crowd of loafers, frowsy women and dogs. His hat gone. His eyes mad. A trickle of wine through his beard. Bellowing. Bellowing again—the untamed centaur cheated of the doe!

And now, perhaps, I can get back to the reasons for this story. And I am almost at the end of it. . . .

In the most obscure alley in Marseilles there is a café frequented by sailors, riff-raff from the waterfront and thieves. Grimshaw appeared there at midnight. A woman clung to his arm. She had no eyes for any one else. Her name, I believe, was Marie—a very humble Magdalen of that tragic back-water of civilization. Putting her cheek against Grimshaw's arm, she listened to him with a curious patience, as one listens to the eloquence of the sea.

"This is no place for thee," he said to her. "Leave me now, *ma petite*."

But she laughed and went with him. Imagine that room—foul air, sanded floor, kerosene lamps, an odour of bad wine, tobacco, and stale humanity. Grimshaw pushed his way to a table and sat down with a surly Gascon and an enormous Negro from some American ship in the harbour.

They brought the poet wine but he did not drink it—sat staring at the smoky ceiling, assailed by a sudden sharp vision of Dagmar and Waram at Broadenham, alone together for the first time, perhaps on the terrace in the starlight, perhaps in Dagmar's bright room which had always been scented, warm, remote—

He had been reciting, of course, in French. Now he broke abruptly into English. No one but the American Negro understood. The proprietor shouted: "Hi, there, Pilleux—no gibberish!" The woman, her eyes on Grimshaw's face, said warningly: "Ssh! He speaks English. He is clever, this poet! Pay attention." And the Negro, startled, jerked his drunken body straight and listened.

I don't know what Grimshaw said. It must have been a poem of home, the bitter longing of an exile for familiar things. At any rate, the Negro was touched—he was a Louisianian, a son of New Orleans. He saw the gentleman, where you and I, perhaps, would have seen only a maudlin savage. There is no other explanation for the thing that happened. . . .

The Gascon, it seems, hated poetry. He tipped over Grimshaw's glass, spilling the wine into the woman's lap. She leaped back, trembling with rage, swearing in the manner of her kind.

"Quiet," Grimshaw said. And her fury receded before his glance; she melted, acquiesced, smiled. Then Grimshaw

smiled, too, and putting the glass to rights with a leisurely gesture, said, "Cabbage. Son of pig," and flipped the dregs into the Gascon's face.

The fellow groaned and leaped. Grimshaw didn't stir—he was too drunk to protect himself. But the Negro saw what was in the Gascon's hand. He kicked back his chair, stretched out his arms—too late. The Gascon's knife, intended for Grimshaw, sliced into his heart. He coughed, looked at the man he had saved with a strange questioning, and collapsed.

Grimshaw was sobered instantly. They say that he broke the Gascon's arm before the crowd could separate them. Then he knelt down by the dying Negro, turned him gently over and lifted him in his arms, supporting that ugly bullet head against his knee. The Negro coughed again, and whispered: "I saw it comin', boss." Grimshaw said simply: "Thank you."

"I'm scared, boss."

"That's all right. I'll see you through."

"I'm dyin', boss."

"Is it hard?"

"Yessir."

"Hold my hand. That's right. Nothing to be afraid of."

The Negro's eyes fixed themselves on Grimshaw's face—a sombre look came into their depths. "I'm goin', boss."

Grimshaw lifted him again. As he did so, he was conscious of feeling faint and dizzy. The Negro's blood was warm on his hands and wrists, but it was not wholly that—He had a sensation of rushing forward; of pressure against his ear-drums; a violent nausea; the crowd of curious faces blurred, disappeared—he was drowning in a noisy darkness. . . . He gasped, struggled, struck out with his arms, shouted, went down in that suffocating flood of unconsciousness. . . .

Opening his eyes after an indeterminate interval, he found himself in the street. The air was cool after the fetid staleness of that room. He was still holding the Negro's hand. And above them the stars burned, remote and calm, like beacon lamps in a dark harbour. . . .

The Negro whimpered: "I don't know the way, boss. I'm lost."

"Where is your ship?"

"In the *Vieux Port*, near the fort."

They walked together through the silent streets. I say that they walked. It was rather that Grimshaw found himself on the quay, the Negro still at his side. A few prowling sailors passed them. But for the most part the waterfront was deserted. The ships lay side by side—an intricate tangle of bowsprits and rigging, masts and chains. Around them the water was black as basalt, only that now and again a spark of light was struck by the faint lifting of the current against the immovable hulls.

The Negro shuffled forward, peering. A lantern flashed on one of the big schooners. Looking up, Grimshaw saw the name: "*Anne Beebe, New Orleans.*" A querulous voice, somewhere on the deck, demanded: "That you, Richardson?" And then, angrily: "This damned place—dark as hell. . . . Who's there?"

Grimshaw answered: "One of your crew."

The man on deck stared down at the quay a moment. Then, apparently having seen nothing, he turned away, and the lantern bobbed aft like a drifting ember. The Negro moaned. Holding both hands over the deep wound in his breast, he slowly climbed the side ladder, turned once, to look at Grimshaw, and disappeared. . . .

Grimshaw felt again the rushing darkness. Again he struggled. And again, opening his eyes after a moment of blankness, he found himself kneeling on the sanded floor of the café, holding the dead Negro in his arms. He glanced down at the face, astounded by the look of placid satisfaction in those wide-open eyes, the smile of recognition, of gratification, of some nameless and magnificent content. . . .

The woman Marie touched his shoulder. "The fellow's dead, *m'sieur*. We had better go."

Grimshaw followed her into the street. He noticed that there were no stars. A bitter wind, forerunner of the implacable *mistral*, had come up. The door of the café slammed behind them, muffling a sudden uproar of voices that had burst out with his going. . . .

Grimshaw had a room somewhere in the Old Town; he went there, followed by the woman. He thought: "I am mad! Mad!" He was frightened, not by what had hap-



pened to him, but because he could not understand. Nor can I make it clear to you, since no explanation is final when we are dealing with the inexplicable. . . .

When they reached his room, Marie lighted the kerosene lamp and, smoothing down her black hair with both hands, said simply: "I stay with you."

"You must not," Grimshaw answered.

"I love you," she said. "You are a great man. *C'est ça*. That is that! Besides, I must love someone—I mean, do for someone. You think that I like pleasure. Ah! Perhaps. I am young. But my heart follows you. I stay here."

Grimshaw stared at her without hearing. "I opened the door. I went beyond. . . . I am perhaps mad. Perhaps privileged. Perhaps what they have always called me—an incorrigible poet." Suddenly he jumped to his feet and shouted: "I went a little way with his soul! Victory! Eternity!"

The woman Marie put her hands on his shoulders and pushed him back into his chair again. She thought, of course, that he was drunk. So she attempted a simple seduction, striving to call attention to herself by the coquetties of her kind. Grimshaw pushed her aside and lay down on the bed with his arms crossed over his eyes. Had he witnessed a soul's first uncertain steps into a new state? One thing he knew—he had himself suffered the confusion of death, and had shared the desperate struggle to penetrate the barrier between the mortal and the immortal, the known and the unknown, the real and the incomprehensible. With that realization, he stepped finally out of his personality into that of the mystic philosopher, Pierre Pilleux. He heard the woman Marie saying: "Let me stay. I am unhappy." And without opening his eyes, simply making a brief gesture, he said: "*Eh bien*." And she stayed.

She never left him again. In the years that followed, wherever Grimshaw was, there also was Marie—little, swarthy, broad of cheek and hip, unimaginative, faithful. She had a passion for service. She cooked for Grimshaw, knitted woollen socks for him, brushed and mended his clothes, watched out for his health—often, I am convinced, she stole for him. As for Grimshaw, he didn't know that she existed,

beyond the fact that she was there and that she made material existence endurable. He never again knew physical love. That I am sure of, for I have talked with Marie. "He was good to me," she said. "But he never loved me." And I believe her.

That night of the Negro's death Grimshaw stood in a wilderness of his own. He emerged from it a believer in life after death. He preached this belief in the slums of Marseilles. It began to be said of him that his presence made death easy, that the touch of his hand steadied those who were about to die. Feverish, terrified, reluctant, they became suddenly calm, wistful, and passed quietly as one falls asleep. "Send for Pierre Pilleux" became a familiar phrase in the Old Town.

I do not believe that he could have touched these simple people had he not looked the part of prophet and saint. The old Grimshaw was gone. In his place an emaciated fanatic, unconscious of appetite, unaware of self, with burning eyes and tangled beard! That finished ugliness turned spiritual—a self-lagellated æsthete. He claimed that he could enter the shadowy confines of the "next world." Not heaven. Not hell. A neutral ground between the familiar earth and an inexplicable territory of the spirit. Here, he said, the dead suffered bewilderment; they remembered, desired, and regretted the life they had just left, without understanding what lay ahead. So far he could go with them. So far and no farther. . . .

Personal immortality is the most alluring hope ever dangled before humanity. All of us secretly desire it. None of us really believe in it. As you say, all of us are afraid and some of us laugh to hide our fear. Grimshaw wasn't afraid. Nor did he laugh. He *knew*. And you remember his eloquence—seductive words, poignant, delicious, memorable words! In his Chelsea days, he had made you sultry with hate. Now, as Pierre Pilleux, he made you believe in the shining beauty of the indestructible, the unconquerable dead. You saw them, a host of familiar figures, walking fearlessly away from you toward the brightness of a distant horizon. You heard them, murmuring together, as they passed out of sight, going forward to share the common and ineffable experience.

Well. . . . The pagan had disappeared in the psy-

chic! Cecil Grimshaw's melancholy and pessimism, his love of power, his delight in cruelty, in beauty, in the erotic, the violent, the strange, had vanished! Pierre Pilleux was a humanitarian. Cecil Grimshaw never had been. Grimshaw had revolted against ugliness as a dilettante objects to the mediocre in art. Pierre Pilleux was conscious of social ugliness. Having become aware of it, he was a potent rebel. He began to write in French, spreading his revolutionary doctrine of facile spiritual reward. He splintered purgatory into fragments; what he offered was an earthly paradise—humanity given eternal absolution, freed of fear, prejudice, hatred—above all, of fear—and certain of endless life.

Now that we have entered the cosmic era, we look back at him with understanding. Then, he was a radical and an atheist.

Of course he had followers—seekers after eternity who drank his promises like thirsty wanderers come upon a spring in the desert. To some of them he was a god. To some, a mystic. To some, a healer. To some—and they were the ones who finally controlled his destiny—he was simply a dangerous lunatic.

Two women in Marseilles committed suicide—they were followers, disciples, whatever you choose to call them. At any rate, they believed that where it was so simple a matter to die, it was foolish to stay on in a world that had treated them badly. One had lost a son, the other a lover. One shot herself; the other drowned herself in the canal. And both of them left letters addressed to Pilleux—enough to damn him in the eyes of authority. He was told that he might leave France, or take the consequences—a mild enough warning, but it worked. He dared not provoke an inquiry into his past. So he shipped on board a small Mediterranean steamer as fireman, and disappeared, no one knew where.

Two years later he reappeared in Africa. Marie was with him. They were living in a small town on the rim of the desert near Biskra. Grimshaw occupied a native house—a mere hovel, flat-roofed, sun-baked, bare as a hermit's cell. Marie had hired herself out as *femme de chambre* in the only hotel in the place. "I watched over him," she told me. "And believe me, *monsieur*, he needed care! He was thin as a ghost. He had starved more than once during those two

years. He told me to go back to France, to seek happiness for myself. But for me happiness was with him. I laughed and stayed. I loved him—magnificently, *monsieur*."

Grimshaw was writing again—in French—and his work began to appear in the Parisian journals, a strange poetic prose impregnated with mysticism. It was Grimshaw, sublimated. I saw it myself, although at that time I had not heard Waram's story. The French critics saw it. "This Pilleux is as picturesque as the English poet, Grimshaw. The style is identical." Waram saw it. He read everything that Pilleux wrote—with eagerness, with terror. Finally, driven by curiosity, he went to Paris, got Pilleux's address from the editor of *Gil Blas*, and started for Africa.

Grimshaw is a misty figure at the last. You see him faintly—an exile, racially featureless, wearing a dirty white native robe, his face wrinkled by exposure to the sun, his eyes burning. Marie says that he prowled about the village at night, whispering to himself, his head thrown back, pointing his beard at the stars. He wrote in the cool hours before dawn, and later, when the village quivered in heat fumes and he slept, Marie posted what he had written to Paris.

One day he took her head between his hands and said very gently: "Why don't you get a lover? Take life while you can."

"You say there is eternal life," she protested.

"*N'en doutez-pas!* But you must be rich in knowledge. Put flowers in your hair. And place your palms against a lover's palms and kiss him with generosity, *ma petite*. I am not a man; I am a shadow."

Marie slipped her arms around him and, standing on tiptoe, put her lips against his. "*Je t'aime*," she said simply.

His eyes deepened. There flashed into them the old, mad humour, the old vitality, the old passion for beauty. The look faded, leaving his eyes "like flames that are quenched." Marie shivered, covered her face with her hands, and ran out. "There was no blood in him," she told me. "He was like a spirit—a ghost. So meagre! So wan! Waxen hands. Yellow flesh. And those eyes, in which, *monsieur*, the flame was quenched!"

And this is the end of the curious story. . . . Waram went to Biskra and from there to the village where Grimshaw

lived. Grimshaw saw him in the street one evening and followed him to the hotel. He lingered outside until Waram had registered at the *bureau* and had gone to his room. Then he went in and sent word that "Pierre Pilleux was below and ready to see Doctor Waram."

He waited in the "garden" at the back of the hotel. No one was about. A cat slept on the wall. Overhead the arch of the sky was flooded with orange light. Dust lay on the leaves of the potted plants and bushes. It was breathless, hot, quiet. He thought: "Waram has come because Dagmar is dead. Or the public has found me out!"

Waram came immediately. He stood in the doorway a moment, staring at the grotesque figure which faced him. He made a terrified gesture, as if he would shut out what he saw. Then he came into the garden, steadying himself by holding on to the backs of the little iron garden chairs. The poet saw that Waram had not changed so very much—a little gray hair in that thick, black mop, a few wrinkles, a rather stodgy look about the waist. No more. He was still Waram, neat, self-satisfied, essentially English. . . . Grimshaw strangled a feeling of aversion and said quietly: "Well, Waram. How d'you do? I call myself Pilleux now."

Waram ignored his hand. Leaning heavily on one of the chairs, he stared with a passionate intentness. "Grimshaw?" he said at last.

"Why, yes," Grimshaw answered. "Didn't you know?"

Waram licked his lips. In a whisper he said: "I killed you in Switzerland six years ago. Killed you, you understand."

Grimshaw touched his breast with both hands. "You lie. Here I am."

"You are dead."

"Dead?"

"Before God, I swear it."

"Dead?"

Grimshaw felt once more the on-rushing flood of darkness. His thoughts flashed back over the years. The "wall." His suffering. The dog. The song in the field. The Negro. The door that opened. The stars. His own flesh, fading into spirit, into shadows. . . .

"Dead?" he demanded again.

Waram's eyes wavered. He laughed unsteadily and looked behind him. "Strange," he said. "I thought I saw——" He turned and went quickly across the garden into the hotel. Grimshaw called once, in a loud voice: "Waram!" But the doctor did not even turn his head. Grimshaw followed him, overtook him, touched his shoulder. Waram paid no attention. Going to the *bureau* he said to the proprietor: "You told me that a Monsieur Pilleux wished to see me."

"*Oui, monsieur.* He was waiting for you in the garden."

"He is not there now."

"But just a moment ago——"

"I am *here*," Grimshaw interrupted.

The proprietor brushed past Waram and peered into the garden. It was twilight out there now. The cat still slept on the wall. Dust on the leaves. Stillness. . . .

"I'm sorry, *monsieur*. He seems to have disappeared."

Doctor Waram straightened his shoulders. "Ah," he said. "Disappeared. Exactly." And passing Grimshaw without a glance he went upstairs.

Grimshaw spoke to the proprietor. But the little man bent over the desk, and began to write in an account book. His pen went on scratching, inscribing large, flourishing numbers in a neat column. . . .

Grimshaw shrugged and went into the street. The crowds paid no attention to him—but then, they never had. A dog sniffed at his heels, whined, and thrust a cold nose into his hand.

He went to his house. "I'll ask Marie," he thought. . . . She was sitting before a mirror, her hands clasped under her chin, smiling at herself. . . . She had put a flower in her hair. Her lips were parted. She smiled at some secret thought. Grimshaw watched her a moment; then with a leap of his heart he touched her shoulder. And she did not turn, did not move. . . .

He knew! He put his fingers on her cheek, her neck, the shining braids of her coarse black hair. Then he walked quickly out of the house, out of the village, toward the desert.

Two men joined him. One of them said: "I have just died." They went on together, their feet whispering in the sand, walking in a globe of darkness until the stars came out—then they saw one another's pale faces and eager, frightened

eyes. Others joined them. And others. Men. Women. A child. Some wept and some murmured and some laughed.

"Is this death?"

"Where now, brother?"

Grimshaw thought: "The end. What next? Beauty. Love. Illusion. Forgetfulness."

He clasped his hands behind his back, lifted his face to the stars, walked steadily forward with that company of the dead, into the desert, out of the story at last.

# COMET<sup>1</sup>

By SAMUEL A. DERIEUX

*From American Magazine*

NO PUPPY ever came into the world under more favourable conditions than Comet. He was descended from a famous family of pointers. Both his mother and father were champions. Before he opened his eyes, while he was still crawling about over his brothers and sisters, blind as puppies are at birth, Jim Thompson, Mr. Devant's kennel master, picked him out.

"That's the best un in the bunch."

When he was only three weeks old he pointed a butterfly that lit in the yard in front of his nose.

"Come here, Molly," yelled Jim to his wife. "Pointed—the little cuss!"

When Thompson started taking the growing pups out of the yard, into the fields to the side of the Devants' great southern winter home, Oak Knob, it was Comet who strayed farthest from the man's protecting care. And when Jim taught them all to follow when he said "Heel," to drop when he said "Drop," and to stand stock-still when he said "Ho," he learned far more quickly than the others.

At six months he set his first covey of quail, and remained perfectly staunch. "He's goin' to make a great dog," said Thompson. Everything—size, muscle, nose, intelligence, earnestness—pointed to the same conclusion. Comet was one of the favoured of the gods.

One day, after the leaves had turned red and brown and the mornings grown chilly, a crowd of people, strangers to him, arrived at Oak Knob. Then out of the house with Thompson came a big man in tweed clothes, and the two walked straight

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to the curious young dogs, who were watching them with shining eyes and wagging tails.

"Well, Thompson," said the big man, "which is the future champion you've been writing me about?"

"Pick him out for yourself, sir," said Thompson confidently.

After that they talked a long time planning for the future of Comet. His yard training was now over (Thompson was only yard trainer), and he must be sent to a man experienced in training and handling for field trials.

"Larsen's the man to bring him out," said the big man in tweeds, who was George Devant himself. "I saw his dogs work in the Canadian Derby."

Thompson spoke hesitatingly, apologetically, as if he hated to bring the matter up. "Mr. Devant, . . . you remember, sir, a long time ago Larsen sued us for old Ben."

"Yes, Thompson; I remember, now that you speak of it."

"Well, you remember the court decided against him, which was the only thing it could do, for Larsen didn't have any more right to that dog than the Sultan of Turkey. But, Mr. Devant, I was there, and I saw Larsen's face when the case went against him."

Devant looked keenly at Thompson.

"Another thing, Mr. Devant," Thompson went on, still hesitatingly; "Larsen had a chance to get hold of this breed of pointers and lost out, because he dickered too long, and acted cheesy. Now they've turned out to be famous. Some men never forget a thing like that. Larsen's been talkin' these pointers down ever since, sir."

"Go on," said Devant.

"I know Larsen's a good trainer. But it'll mean a long trip for the young dog to where he lives. Now, there's an old trainer lives near here, Wade Swygert. There never was a straighter man than him. He used to train dogs in England."

Devant smiled. "Thompson, I admire your loyalty to your friends; but I don't think much of your business sense. We'll turn over some of the others to Swygert, if he wants 'em. Comet must have the best. I'll write Larsen to-night, Thompson. To-morrow, crate Comet and send him off."

Just as no dog ever came into the world under more favour-

able auspices, so no dog ever had a bigger "send-off" than Comet. Even the ladies of the house came out to exclaim over him, and Marian Devant, pretty, eighteen, and a sports-woman, stooped down, caught his head between her hands, looked into his fine eyes, and wished him "Good luck, old man." In the living-room the men laughingly drank toasts to his future, and from the high-columned portico Marian Devant waved him good-bye, as in his clean padded crate he was driven off, a bewildered youngster, to the station.

Two days and two nights he travelled, and at noon of the third day, at a lonely railroad station in a prairie country that rolled like a heavy sea, he was lifted, crate and all, off the train. A lean, pale-eyed, sanctimonious-looking man came toward him.

"Some beauty that, Mr. Larsen," said the agent as he helped Larsen's man lift the crate onto a small truck.

"Yes," drawled Larsen in a meditative voice, "pretty enough to look at—but he looks scared—er—timid."

"Of course he's scared," said the agent; "so would you be if they was to put you in some kind of a whale of a balloon an' ship you in a crate to Mars."

The station agent poked his hands through the slats and patted the head. Comet was grateful for that, because everything was strange. He had not whined nor complained on the trip, but his heart had pounded fast, and he had been homesick.

And everything continued to be strange: the treeless country through which he was driven, the bald house and huge barns where he was lifted out, the dogs that crowded about him when he was turned into the kennel yard. These eyed him with enmity and walked round and round him. But he stood his ground staunchly for a youngster, returning fierce look for fierce look, growl for growl, until the man called him away and chained him to a kennel.

For days Comet remained chained, a stranger in a strange land. Each time at the click of the gate announcing Larson's entrance he sprang to his feet from force of habit, and stared hungrily at the man for the light he was accustomed to see in human eyes. But with just a glance at him the man would turn one or more of the other dogs loose and ride off to train them.

But he was not without friends of his own kind. Now and then another young dog (he alone was chained up) would stroll his way with wagging tail, or lie down near by, in that strange bond of sympathy that is not confined to man. Then Comet would feel better and would want to play, for he was still half puppy. Sometimes he would pick up a stick and shake it, and his partner would catch the other end. They would tug and growl with mock ferocity, and then lie down and look at each other curiously.

If any attention had been paid him by Larsen, Comet would have quickly overcome his feeling of strangeness. He was no milksop. He was like an overgrown boy, off at college or in some foreign city. He was sensitive, and not sure of himself. Had Larsen gained his confidence, it would all have been different. And as for Larsen—he knew that perfectly well.

One fine sunny afternoon Larsen entered the yard, came straight to him, and turned him loose. In the exuberance of his spirits he ran round and round the yard, barking in the faces of his friends. Larsen let him out, mounted a horse, and commanded him to heel. He obeyed with wagging tail.

A mile or more down the road Larsen turned off into the fields. Across his saddle was something the young pointer had had no experience with—a gun. That part of his education Thompson had neglected, at least put off, for he had not expected that Comet would be sent away so soon. That was where Thompson had made a mistake.

At the command "Hi on" the young pointer ran eagerly around the horse, and looked up into the man's face to be sure he had heard aright. At something he saw there the tail and ears drooped momentarily, and there came over him again a feeling of strangeness, almost of dismay. Larsen's eyes were mere slits of blue glass, and his mouth was set in a thin line.

At a second command, though, he galloped off swiftly, boldly. Round and round an extensive field of straw he circled, forgetting any feeling of strangeness now, every fibre of his being intent on the hunt, while Larsen, sitting on his horse, watched him with appraising eyes.

Suddenly there came to Comet's nose the smell of game birds, strong, pungent, compelling. He stiffened into an earn-

est, beautiful point. Heretofore in the little training he had had Thompson had come up behind him, flushed the birds, and made him drop. And now Larsen, having quickly dismounted and tied his horse, came up behind him, just as Thompson had done, except that in Larsen's hand was the gun.

The old-fashioned black powder of a generation ago makes a loud explosion. It sounds like a cannon compared with the modern smokeless powder now used by all hunters. Perhaps it was only an accident that had caused Larsen before he left the house to load his pump gun with black powder shells.

As for Comet he only knew that the birds rose; then above his head burst an awful roar, almost splitting his tender eardrums, shocking every sensitive nerve, filling him with terror such as he had never felt before. Even then, in the confusion and horror of the surprise, he turned to the man, head ringing, eyes dilated. A single reassuring word, and he would have steadied. As for Larsen, though, he declared afterward (to others and to himself even) that he noticed no nervousness in the dog; that he was only intent on getting several birds for breakfast.

Twice, three times, four times, the pump gun bellowed in its cannon-like roar, piercing the eardrums, shattering the nerves. Comet turned; one more glance backward at a face, strange, exultant—and then the puppy in him conquered. Tail tucked, he ran away from that shattering noise.

Miles he ran. Now and then, stumbling over briars, he yelped. Not once did he look back. His tail was tucked, his eyes crazy with fear. Seeing a house, he made for that. It was the noon hour, and a group of farm hands was gathered in the yard. One of them, with a cry "Mad dog!" ran into the house after a gun. When he came out, they told him the dog was under the porch. And so he was. Pressed against the wall, in the darkness, the magnificent young pointer with the quivering soul waited, panting, eyes gleaming, the horror still ringing in his ears.

Here Larsen found him that afternoon. A boy crawled underneath the porch and dragged him out. He, who had started life favoured of the gods, who that morning even had been full of high spirits, who had circled a field like a cham-

pion, was now a cringing, shaking creature, like a homeless cur.

And thus it happened that Comet came home, in disgrace—a gun-shy dog, a coward, expelled from college, not for some youthful prank, but because he was—yellow. And he knew he was disgraced. He saw it in the face of the big man, Devant, who looked at him in the yard where he had spent his happy puppyhood, then turned away. He knew it because of what he saw in the face of Jim Thompson.

In the house was a long and plausible letter, explaining how it happened:

I did everything I could. I never was as surprised in my life. The dog's hopeless.

As for the other inhabitants of the big house, their minds were full of the events of the season: de luxe hunting parties, more society events than hunts; lunches in the woods served by uniformed butlers; launch rides up the river; arriving and departing guests. Only one of them, except Devant himself, gave the gun-shy dog a thought. Marian Devant came out to visit him in his disgrace. She stooped before him as she had done on that other and happier day, and again caught his head between her hands. But his eyes did not meet hers, for in his dim way he knew he was not now what he had been.

"I don't believe he's yellow—inside!" she declared, looking up at Thompson, her cheeks flushed.

Thompson shook his head.

"I tried him with a gun, Miss Marian," he declared. "I just showed it to him, and he ran into his kennel."

"I'll go get mine. He won't run from me."

But at sight of her small gun it all came back. Again he seemed to hear the explosion that had shattered his nerves. The Terror had entered his very soul. In spite of her pleading, he made for his kennel. Even the girl turned away from him now. And as he lay panting in the shelter of his kennel he knew that never again would men look at him as they had looked, or life be sweet to him as it had been.

Then there came to Oak Knob an old man to see Thompson. He had been on many seas, he had fought in a dozen wars, and had settled at last on a little truck farm near by.

Somewhere, in his life full of adventure and odd jobs, he had trained dogs and horses. His face was lined and seamed, his hair was white, his eyes piercing, blue and kind. Wade Swygert was his name.

"There's been dirty work," he said, when he looked at the dog. "I'll take him if you're goin' to give him away."

Give him away—who had been Championship hope!

Marian Devant came out and looked into the face of the old man, shrewdly, understandingly.

"Can you cure him?" she demanded.

"I doubt it, miss," was the sturdy answer.

"You will try?"

The blue eyes lighted up. "Yes, I'll try."

"Then you can have him. And—if there's any expense——"

"Come, Comet," said the old man.

That night, in a neat, humble house, Comet ate supper placed before him by a stout old woman, who had followed this old man to the ends of the world. That night he slept before their fire. Next day he followed the old man all about the place. Several days and nights passed this way, then, while he lay before the fire, old Swygert came in with a gun. At sight of it Comet sprang to his feet. He tried to rush out of the room, but the doors were closed. Finally, he crawled under the bed.

Every night after that Swygert got out the gun, until he crawled under the bed no more. Finally, one day the man fastened the dog to a tree in the yard, then came out with a gun. A sparrow lit in a tree, and he shot it. Comet tried to break the rope. All his panic had returned; but the report had not shattered him as that other did, for the gun was loaded light.

After that, frequently the old man shot a bird in his sight, loading the gun more and more heavily, and each time after the shot coming to him, showing him the bird, and speaking to him kindly, gently. But for all that the Terror remained in his heart.

One afternoon the girl, accompanied by a young man, rode over on horseback, dismounted, and came in. She always stopped when she was riding by.

"It's mighty slow business," old Swygert reported; "I don't know whether I'm makin' any headway or not."

That night old Mrs. Swygert told him she thought he had better give it up. It wasn't worth the time and worry. The dog was just yellow.

Swygert pondered a long time. "When I was a kid," he said at last, "there came up a terrible thunderstorm. It was in South America. I was water boy for a railroad gang, and the storm drove us in a shack. While lightnin' was hittin' all around, one of the grown men told me it always picked out boys with red hair. My hair was red, an' I was little and ignorant. For years I was skeered of lightnin'. I never have quite got over it. But no man ever said I was yellow."

Again he was silent for a while. Then he went on: "I don't seem to be makin' much headway, I admit that. I'm lettin' him run away as far as he can. Now I've got to shoot an' make him come toward the gun himself, right while I'm shootin' it."

Next day Comet was tied up and fasted, and next, until he was gaunt and famished. Then, on the afternoon of the third day, Mrs. Swygert, at her husband's direction, placed before him, within reach of his chain, some raw beefsteak. As he started for it, Swygert shot. He drew back, panting, then, hunger getting the better of him, started again. Again Swygert shot.

After that for days Comet "Ate to music," as Swygert expressed it. "Now," he said, "he's got to come toward the gun when he's not even tied up."

Not far from Swygert's house is a small pond, and on one side the banks are perpendicular. Toward this pond the old man, with the gun under his arm and the dog following, went. Here in the silence of the woods, with just the two of them together, was to be a final test.

On the shelving bank Swygert picked up a stick and tossed it into the middle of the pond with the command to "fetch." Comet sprang eagerly in and retrieved it. Twice this was repeated. But the third time, as the dog approached the shore, Swygert picked up the gun and fired.

Quickly the dog dropped the stick, then turned and swam toward the other shore. Here, so precipitous were the banks, he could not get a foothold. He turned once more and struck out diagonally across the pond. Swygert met him and fired.

Over and over it happened. Each time, after he fired, the

old man stooped down with extended hand and begged him to come on. His face was grim now, and, though the day was cool, sweat stood out on his brow. "You'll face the music," he said, "or you'll drown. Better be dead than called yellow."

The dog was growing weary now. His head was barely above water. His efforts to clamber up the opposite bank were feeble, frantic. Yet, each time as he drew near the shore Swygert fired.

He was not using light loads now. He was using the regular load of the bird hunter. Time had passed for temporizing. The sweat was standing out all over his face. The sternness in his eyes was terrible to see, for it was the sternness of a man who is suffering.

A dog can swim a long time. The sun dropped over the trees. Still the firing went on, regularly, like a minute gun.

Just before the sun set an exhausted dog staggered toward an old man almost as exhausted as he. The dog had been too near death and was too faint to care now for the gun that was being fired over his head. On and on he came, toward the man, disregarding the noise of the gun. It would not hurt him, that he knew at last. He might have many enemies, but the gun, in the hands of this man, was not one of them. Suddenly old Swygert sank down and took the dripping dog in his arms.

"Old boy," he said, "old boy."

That night Comet lay before the fire, and looked straight into the eyes of a man, as he used to look in the old days.

Next season Larsen, glancing over his sporting papers, was astonished to see that among promising Derbys the fall trials had called forth was a pointer named Comet. He would have thought it some other dog than the one who had disappointed him so by turning out gun-shy, in spite of all his efforts to prevent, had it not been for the fact that the entry was booked as: "Comet; owner, Miss Marian Devant; handler, Wade Swygert."

Next year he was still more astonished to see in the same paper that Comet, handled by Swygert, had won first place in a Western trial, and was prominently spoken of as a National Championship possibility. As for him, he had no young entries to offer, but was staking everything on the National Championship, where he was to enter Larsen's Peerless II.



It was strange how things fell out—but things have a habit of turning out strangely in field trials, as well as elsewhere. When Larsen reached the town where the National Championship was to be run, there on the street, straining at the leash held by old Swygert, whom he used to know, was a seasoned young pointer, with a white body, a brown head, and a brown saddle spot—the same pointer he had seen two years before turn tail and run in that terror a dog never quite overcomes.

But the strangest thing of all happened that night at the drawing, when, according to the slips taken at random from a hat, it was declared that on the following Wednesday Comet, the pointer, was to run with Peerless II.

It gave Larsen a strange thrill, this announcement. He left the meeting and went straightway to his room. There for a long time he sat pondering. Next day at a hardware store he bought some black powder and some shells.

The race was to be run next day, and that night in his room he loaded half-a-dozen shells. It would have been a study in faces to watch him as he bent over his work, on his lips a smile. Into the shells he packed all the powder they could stand, all the powder his trusted gun could stand, without bursting. It was a load big enough to kill a bear, to bring down a buffalo. It was a load that would echo and reëcho in the hills.

On the morning that Larsen walked out in front of the judges and the field, Peerless II at the leash, old Swygert, with Comet at his side, he glanced around at the "field," or spectators. Among them was a handsome young woman, and with her, to his amazement, George Devant. He could not help chuckling inside himself as he thought of what would happen that day, for once a gun-shy dog, always a gun-shy dog—that was *his* experience.

As for Comet, he faced the straw fields eagerly, confidently, already a veteran. Long ago fear of the gun had left him, for the most part. There were times when at a report above his head he still trembled, and the shocked nerves in his ear gave a twinge like that of a bad tooth. But always at the quiet voice of the old man, his god, he grew steady, and remained staunch.

Some disturbing memory did start within him to-day as he

glanced at the man with the other dog. It seemed to him as if in another and an evil world he had seen that face. His heart began to pound fast, and his tail drooped for a moment. Within an hour it was all to come back to him—the terror, the panic, the agony of that far-away time.

He looked up at old Swygert, who was his god, and to whom his soul belonged, though he was booked as the property of Miss Marian Devant. Of the arrangements he could know nothing, being a dog. Old Swygert, having cured him, could not meet the expenses of taking him to field trials. The girl had come to the old man's assistance, an assistance which he had accepted only under condition that the dog should be entered as hers, with himself as handler.

"Are you ready, gentlemen?" the judges asked.

"Ready," said Larsen and old Swygert.

And Comet and Peerless II were speeding away across that field, and behind them came handlers, and judges and spectators, all mounted.

It was a race people still talk about, and for a reason, for strange things happened that day. At first there was nothing unusual. It was like any other field trial. Comet found birds, and Swygert, his handler, flushed them and shot. Comet remained steady. Then Peerless II found a covey, and Larsen flushed them and shot. And so for an hour it went.

Then Comet disappeared, and old Swygert, riding hard and looking for him, went out of sight over a hill. But Comet had not gone far. As a matter of fact, he was near by, hidden in some high straw, pointing a covey of birds. One of the spectators spied him, and called the judges' attention to him. Everybody, including Larsen, rode up to him, but still Swygert had not come back.

They called him, but the old man was a little deaf. Some of the men rode to the top of the hill but could not see him. In his zeal he had got a considerable distance away. Meanwhile, here was his dog, pointed.

If any one had looked at Larsen's face he would have seen the exultation there, for now his chance had come—the very chance he had been looking for. It's a courtesy one handler sometimes extends another who is absent from the spot, to go in and flush his dog's birds.

"I'll handle this covey for Mr. Swygert," said Larsen to the judges, his voice smooth and plausible, on his face a smile.

And thus it happened that Comet faced his supreme ordeal without the steadying voice of his god.

He only knew that ahead of him were birds, and that behind him a man was coming through the straw, and that behind the man a crowd of people on horseback were watching him. He had become used to that, but when, out of the corner of his eye, he saw the face of the advancing man, his soul began to tremble.

"Call your dog in, Mr. Larsen," directed the judge. "Make him backstand."

Only a moment was lost, while Peerless, a young dog himself, came running in and at a command from Larsen stopped in his tracks behind Comet, and pointed. Larsen's dogs always obeyed, quickly, mechanically. Without ever gaining their confidence, Larsen had a way of turning them into finished field-trial dogs. They obeyed, because they were afraid not to.

According to the rules the man handling the dog has to shoot as the birds rise. This is done in order to test the dog's steadiness when a gun is fired over him. No specification is made as to the size of the shotgun to be used. Usually, however, small-gauge guns are carried. The one in Larsen's hands was a twelve gauge, and consequently large.

All morning he had been using it over his own dog. Nobody had paid any attention to it, because he shot smokeless powder. But now, as he advanced, he reached into the left-hand pocket of his hunting coat, where six shells rattled as he hurried along. Two of these he took out and rammed into the barrels.

As for Comet, still standing rigid, statuesque, he heard, as has been said, the brush of steps through the straw, glimpsed a face, and trembled. But only for a moment. Then he steadied, head high, tail straight out. The birds rose with a whirl—and then was repeated that horror of his youth. Above his ears, ears that would always be tender, broke a great roar. Either because of his excitement, or because of a sudden wave of revenge, or of a determination to make sure of the dog's flight, Larsen had pulled both triggers at once. The combined report shattered through the dog's eardrums,

it shivered through his nerves, he sank in agony into the straw.

Then the old impulse to flee was upon him, and he sprang to his feet, and looked about wildly. But from somewhere in that crowd behind him came to his tingling ears a voice—clear, ringing, deep, the voice of a woman—a woman he knew—pleading as his master used to plead, calling on him not to run, but to stand.

"Steady," it said. "Steady, Comet!"

It called him to himself, it soothed him, it calmed him, and he turned and looked toward the crowd. With the roar of the shotgun the usual order observed in field trials was broken up. All rules seemed to have been suspended. Ordinarily, no one belonging to "the field" is allowed to speak to a dog. Yet the girl had spoken to him. Ordinarily, the spectators must remain in the rear of the judges. Yet one of the judges had himself wheeled his horse about and was galloping off, and Marian Devant had pushed through the crowd and was riding toward the bewildered dog.

He stood staunch where he was, though in his ears was still a throbbing pain, and though all about him was this growing confusion he could not understand. The man he feared was running across the field yonder, in the direction taken by the judge. He was blowing his whistle as he ran. Through the crowd, his face terrible to see, his own master was coming. Both the old man and the girl had dismounted now, and were running toward him.

"I heard," old Swygert was saying to her. "I heard it! I might 'a' known! I might 'a' known!"

"He stood," she panted, "like a rock—oh, the brave, beautiful thing!"

"Where is that——" Swygert suddenly checked himself and looked around.

A man in the crowd (they had all gathered about now), laughed.

"He's gone after his dog," he said. "Peerless has run away!"

## FIFTY-TWO WEEKS FOR FLORETTE

By ELIZABETH ALEXANDER HEERMANN\*

IT HAD been over two months since Freddy Le Fay's bill had been paid, and Miss Nellie Blair was worried. She had written to Freddy's mother repeatedly, but there had been no answer.

"It's all your own fault, sister. You should never have taken Freddy," Miss Eva said sharply. "I told you so at the time, when I saw his mother's hair. And of course Le Fay is not her real name. It looks to me like a clear case of desertion."

"I can't believe it. She seemed so devoted," faltered Miss Nellie.

"Oh, a girl like that!" Miss Eva sniffed. "You should never have consented."

"Well, the poor thing was so worried, and if it meant saving a child from a dreadful life——"

"There are other schools more suitable."

"But, sister, she seemed to have her heart set on ours. She begged me to make a little gentleman out of him."

"As if you could ever do that!"

"Why not?" asked Mary, their niece.

"That dreadful child!"

"Freddy isn't dreadful!" cried Mary hotly.

"With that atrocious slang! Won't eat his oatmeal! And he's such a queer child—queer! So pale, never laughs, doesn't like any one. Why should you take up for him? He doesn't even like you. Hates me, I suppose."

"It's because we are so different from the women he has known," said Mary.

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\*Elizabeth Alexander in *Saturday Evening Post*, August 13, 1921.

"I should hope so! Well, sister, what are you going to do about it?"

"I don't know what to do," sighed Miss Nellie. "He hasn't any other relatives as far as I know. And the summer coming on, what shall we do?"

"Nothing for it but to send him to an orphanage if she doesn't write soon," said Miss Eva.

"Oh, auntie, you wouldn't!"

"Why not? How can we afford to give children free board and education?"

"It's only one child."

"It would be a dozen, if we once started it."

"I'll wait another month," said Miss Nellie, "and then, really, something will have to be done."

The girl looked out of the window.

"There he is now," she said, "sitting on the stone wall at the end of the garden. It's his favourite spot."

"What on earth he wants to sit there for—away from all the other children! He never plays. Look at him! Just sitting there—not moving. How stupid!" exclaimed Miss Eva impatiently.

"I do declare, I believe he's fallen asleep," said Miss Nellie.

Freddy was not asleep. He had only to close his eyes and it would all come back to him. Memories that he could not put into words, sensations without definite thought, crowded in upon him. The smell—the thick smell of grease paint, choking powder, dust, gas, old walls, bodies, and breath, and sharp perfume; the sickening, delicious, stale, enchanting, never-to-be-forgotten odour of the theatre; the nerves' sudden tension at the cry of "Ov-a-chure"; their tingling as the jaded music blares; the lift of the heart as the curtain rises; the catch in the throat as Florette runs on to do her turn.

Florette was a performer on the trapeze in vaudeville. Her figure was perfect from the strenuous daily exercise. She was small, young, and a shade too blonde. First she appeared in a sort of blue evening dress, except that it was shorter even than a débutante's. She ran out quickly from the wings, bowed excessively, smiled appealingly, and, skipping over to the trapeze, seized the two iron rings that hung from ropes. Lifting her own weight by the strength in her slender wrists, she flung her legs upward and hooked her knees into the rings.

Then hanging head downward she swung back and forth; flung herself upright again, sat and swung; climbed to the topmost bar of the trapeze and hung down again. Her partner ran on and repeated her monkeylike manœuvres. Then Florette held his hands while he swung upside down; he held Florette while she swung upside down. They turned head over heels, over and over each other, up and down, catching and slipping, and adjusting their balance, in time to gay tunes.

Sometimes the audience clapped. Sometimes they were too familiar with their kind of flirtation with death to clap. Then Florette and her partner would invent something a little more daring. They would learn to balance themselves on chairs tilted on two legs on the trapeze, or Florette would hang by only one hand, or she would support her partner by a strap held in her teeth. Sometimes Florette's risks were great enough to thrill the audience with the thought of death.

The thought of a slip, broken bones, delighted the safe people in comfortable chairs. They laughed. Florette laughed, too, for Freddy was waiting in the wings.

There were mothers in the audience who cooked and mended, swept and dusted, ran up and down innumerable stairs, washed greasy dishes, wore ugly house dresses, slaved and scolded and got chapped hands, all for their children. Florette, always dainty and pretty, had nothing to do but airily, gracefully swing, and smile. Other mothers spent their lives for their little boys. Florette only risked hers twice a day.

While the partner played an accordion Florette ran out for her quick change. Freddy was waiting, with her dress hung over a chair. He flew to meet her. His eager, nimble fingers unfastened the blue frock. He slipped the next costume over her head without mussing a single beloved blonde hair. The second costume was a tight-fitting silver bodice with a fluff of green skirt underneath. Freddy had it fastened up in a twinkling. Florette ran out again and pulled herself up into the trapeze.

While Florette went through the second part of her act Freddy folded up the blue costume and trudged upstairs with it. Florette's dressing room was usually up four flights. Freddy put the blue dress on a coat hanger and wrapped a

mauslin cover about it. Then he trudged down the four flights again, with the third costume over his arm. It was a Chinese jacket and a pair of tight, short blue satin trousers, and Freddy was very proud of this confection. He stood as a screen for Florette while she put on the trousers, and there are not many little boys who have a mamma who could look so pretty in them.

Florette skipped out lightly and finished her act by swinging far out over the audience, back and forth, faster and faster, farther and farther out, until it seemed as if she were going to fling herself into the lap of some middle-aged gentleman in the third row. His wife invariably murmured something about a hussy as Florette's pretty bare legs flashed overhead. The music played louder, ended with a boom from the drum. Florette flung herself upright, kissed her hands, the curtain fell, and the barelegged hussy ran up to the dressing room where her little son waited.

Freddy had already hung up and shrouded the silver-and-green costume, and was waiting for the Chinese one. He pounced upon it, muttered about some wrinkles, put it into place, and went to the dressing table to hand Florette the cold cream. He found her make-up towel, all caked with red and blue, which she had flung down on the floor. He patted her highly glittering hair and adjusted a pin. He marshalled the jars and little pans and sticks of grease paint on her shelf into an orderly row and blew off the deep layers of powder she had scattered. Then he took down her street dress from its hook and slipped it deftly over her shoulders and had it buttoned up before Florette could yawn. He handed her her saucy bright hat. He flung himself into his own coat.

"Well, le's go, Florette!" cried Freddy gayly, with dancing eyes. He had never called her mamma. She was too little and cute.

Then they would go to the hotel, never the best, where they were stopping. The room with its greenish light, its soiled lace curtains, the water pitcher always cracked, the bed always lumpy, the sheets always damp, was home to Freddy. Florette made it warm and cozy even when there was no heat in the radiator. She had all sorts of clever home-making tricks. She toasted marshmallows over the gas jet; she spread a shawl on the trunk; or she surprised Freddy by pin-



ning pictures out of the funny page on the wall. She' could make the nicest tea on a little alcohol stove she carried in her trunk. There was always a little feast after the theatre on the table that invariably wobbled. Freddy would pretend that the foot of the iron bed was a trapeze. How they laughed. On freezing nights in Maine or Minnesota, Florette would let Freddy warm his feet against hers, or she would get up and spread her coat that looked just like fur over the bed.

When they struck a new town at the beginning of each week Freddy and Florette would go bumming and see all the sights, whether it was Niagara Falls or just the new Methodist Church in Cedar Rapids. Freddy would have been sorry for little boys who had to stay in one home all the time—that is, if he had known anything at all about them. But the life of the strolling player was all that he had ever known, and he found it delightful, except for the dreaded intervals of "bookin' the ac'."

The dream of every vaudevillian is to be booked for fifty-two unbroken weeks in the year, but few attain such popularity. Florette's seasons were sometimes long, sometimes short; but there always came the tedious worrying intervals when managers and agents must be besought for work. Perhaps she would find that people were tired of her old tricks, and she would have to rehearse new ones, or interpolate new songs and gags. Then the new act would be tried out at some obscure vaudeville house, and if it didn't go the rehearsals and trappings to agents must begin all over again. Freddy shared the anxieties and hardships of these times. But the only hardship he really minded was the loss of Florette, for of course the pretty Miss Le Fay, who was only nineteen on the agents' books, could not appear on Broadway with a great big boy like Freddy.

However, the bad times always ended, and Florette and Freddy would set out gayly once more for Oshkosh or Atlanta, Dallas or Des Moines. Meals expanded, Florette bought a rhinestone-covered comb, and the two adventurers indulged in an orgy of chocolate drops. With the optimism of the actor, they forgot all about the dismal past weeks, and saw the new tour as never ending.

Freddy felt himself once more a real and important human

being with a place in the sun, not just a child to be shushed by a dingy landlady while his mother was out looking for a job. He knew that he was as necessary a part of Florette's act as her make-up box. He believed himself to be as necessary a part of her life as the heart in her breast, for Florette lavished all her beauty, all her sweetness on him. No Johns for Florette, pretty and blonde though she was. To the contempt of her contemporaries Florette refused every chance for a free meal. Freddy was her sweetheart, her man. She had showered so many pretty love words on him, she had assured him so often that he was all in the world she wanted, that Freddy was stunned one day to hear that he was to have a papa.

"I don' wan' one," said Freddy flatly. "I ain't never had one, an' I ain't got no use for one."

Florette looked cross—an unusual thing.

"Aw, now, Freddy, don't be a grouch," she said.

"I don' wan' one," repeated Freddy.

"You ought to be glad to get a papa!" cried Florette.

"Why?"

"Makes you respectable."

"What's that?"

"Who'd believe I was a widow—in this profession?"

Freddy still looked blank.

"Well," said Florette, "you're goin' to get a nice papa, so there now!"

Then the cruel truth dawned on Freddy. It was Florette who wanted a papa. He had not been enough for her. In some way Florette had found him lacking.

Tactfully, Freddy dropped the subject of papas, wooed Florette, and tried to atone for his shortcomings. He redoubled his compliments, trotted out all the love words he knew, coaxed Florette with everything she liked best in him. He even offered to have his nails filed. At night, in bed, he kissed Florette's bare back between the shoulder blades, and snuggled close to her, hugging her desperately with his little thin arms.

"Flo," he quavered, "you—you ain't lonesome no more, are you?"

"Me? Lonesome? Watcher talkin' about, kid?" sleepily murmured Florette.

"You ain't never lonesome when you got me around, are you, Flo?"

"Sure I ain't. Go to sleep, honey."

"But, Florette——"

Florette was dozing.

"Oh, Florette! Florette!"

"Florette, if you ain't lonesome——"

"Sh-h-h, now, sh-h-h! Le's go to sleep."

"But, Florette, you don' wan'—you don' wan'—a pop——"

"Sh-h-h! Sh-h-h! I'm so tired, honey."

Florette slept. Freddy lay awake, but he lay still so as not to disturb her. His arms ached, but he dared not let her go. Finally he slept, and dreamed of a world in which there was no Florette. He shuddered and kicked his mother. She gave him a little impatient shove. He woke. Day was dawning. It was Florette's wedding day. Freddy did not know it until Florette put on her best coral-velvet hat with the jet things dangling over her ears.

"You ain' gonna wear that hat," said Freddy severely. "It's rainin'."

"Yeah, I'm gonna wear this hat," said Florette, pulling her blonde earbobs into greater prominence. "An' you put on your best suit an' new necktie. We're goin' to a weddin'."

Her tone was gay, arch, her eyes were happy.

"Who—whose?" Freddy faltered.

"Mine!" chirped Florette. "I'm goin' to get you that papa I promised you."

Freddy turned away.

"Sulkin'!" chided Florette. "Naughty, jealous boy!"

The new papa did not appear so formidable as Freddy had expected. In fact, he turned out to be only Howard, Florette's acrobatic partner. Freddy philosophically reflected that if one must have a new papa, far better so to call Howard, who necessarily encroached on Florette's time, than a stranger who might take up some of her leisure hours.

But Freddy received a distinct shock when the new papa joined them after the evening performance and accompanied them up to their room.

Freddy had always regarded Florette's room as his, too. He felt that the new papa was an intruder in their home. Alas! It soon became all too apparent that it was Freddy

who was *de trop*, or, as he would have expressed it, a Mister Buttinski.

They were having a little supper of pickles and cheese and liver sausage and jam. Florette and the papa drank out of a bottle by turns and laughed a great deal. Florette seemed to think the papa very clever and funny. She laughed at everything he said. She looked at him with shining eyes. She squeezed his hand under the table. Freddy tried in vain to attract her attention. Finally he gave up and sat staring at the oblivious couple with a stupid expression.

"That kid's half asleep," said the new papa.

Florette looked at Freddy and was annoyed by his vacant eyes.

"Go to bed right away," she commanded.

Freddy looked at her in amazement.

"Ain't you goin', too, Florette?" he asked.

"No, you go on—go to sleep."

"Git into that nice li'l cot an' go by-by," said the new papa genially.

Freddy had not seen the cot before. It had been moved in during his absence at the theatre, and stood white, narrow, and lonely, partly concealed by a screen.

"I—I always slep' with Florette," faltered Freddy.

This seemed to amuse the new papa. But Florette flushed and looked annoyed.

"Now, Freddy, are you goin' to be a grouch?" she wailed.

Freddy was kissed good-night, and went to sleep in the cot. He found it cold and unfriendly. But habit, the much maligned, is kind as well as cruel; if it can accustom us to evil, so can it soften pain. Freddy was beginning to assume proprietary airs toward the cot, which appeared in every town, and even to express views as to the relative values of cots in Springfield, Akron, or Joliet—when one night he woke to hear Florette sobbing.

Freddy lay awake listening. He had sobbed, too, when he was first banished to the cot. Was Florette missing him as he had missed her? Ah, if she at last had seen that papas were not half so nice as Freddy's, he would not be hard on her. His heart swelled with forgiveness and love. He stole on tiptoe to Florette's bedside.

"Flo," he whispered.

The sobbing ceased. Florette held her breath and pretended to be asleep. Freddy wriggled his little thin body under the covers and threw his arms around Florette. With a gulp, she turned and threw her arms around him. They clasped each other tight and clung without speaking. They lay on the edge of the bed, holding their breath in order not to wake the papa who snored loudly. Freddy's cheeks and hair were wet, a cold tear trickled down his neck, his body ached from the hard edge of the bed; but he was happy, as only a child or a lover can be, and Freddy was both.

In the morning the papa was cross. He did not seem to care for his own breakfast, but concentrated his attention on Freddy's. Freddy had always been accustomed to a nice breakfast of tea and toast and jam, but Howard insisted on ordering oatmeal for him.

"Naw, Freddy can't stand oatmeal," Florette objected.

"It's good for him," said Howard, staring severely at his son across the white-topped restaurant table.

"I don' see no use forcin' a person to eat what they can't stomach," said Florette.

"Yeah, tha's the way you've always spoiled that kid. Look a' them pale cheeks! Li'l ole pale face!" Howard taunted, stretching a teasing hand toward Freddy. "Mamma's boy! Reg'lar sissy, he is!"

He gave Freddy a poke in the ribs. Freddy shrank back, made himself as small as possible in his chair, looked mutely at Florette.

"Aw, cut it out, Howard," she begged. "Quit raggin' the kid, can't you?"

"Mamma's blessed sugar lump!" jeered Howard, with an ugly gleam in his eye. "Ought to wear a bib with pink ribbons, so he ought. Gimme a nursin' bottle for the baby, waiter!"

The impertinence of this person amazed Freddy. He could only look at his tormentor speechlessly. Freddy and Florette had been such great chums that she had never used the maternal prerogative of rudeness. He had never had any home life, so he was unaware of the coolness with which members of a family can insult one another. Howard's tones, never low, were unusually loud this morning, and people turned around to laugh at the blushing child. The

greasy waiter grinned and set the oatmeal which Howard had ordered before Freddy.

"Now, then, young man," commanded Howard sternly, "you eat that, and you eat it quick!"

Freddy obeyed literally, swallowing as fast as he could, with painful gasps and gulps, fighting to keep the tears back. Florette reached under the table and silently squeezed his knee. He flashed her a smile and swallowed a huge slimy mouthful.

"You ain't eatin' nothin' yourse'f, Howard," said Florette acidly. "W'y don' you have some oatmeal?"

"Tha's right!" shouted Howard. "Side with the kid against me! Tha's all the thanks I get for tryin' to make a man out o' the li'l sissy. Oughta known better'n to marry a woman with a spoiled brat."

"Sh-h-h!" whispered Florette. "Don't tell the whole resturant about your fam'ly troubles."

"Say," hissed Howard, bending down toward her and thrusting out his jaw, "lay off o' me, will yer?"

"Lay off yourse'f!" retorted Florette under her breath. "If you wanna fight le's go back to the hotel where it's private."

"I don' min' tellin' the world I bin stung!" roared Howard.

Florette flushed up to the slightly darker roots of her too-blond hair.

"You?" she gasped furiously. "After all I've put up with!"

"Say, you ain't got any kick comin'! I treated you white, marryin' you, an' no questions asked."

"What-ta you mean?" breathed Florette, growing deathly pale.

Freddy, alarmed, half rose from his chair.

"Sit down there you!" roared Howard. "What-ta I mean, Miss Innocence?" he said, mimicking Florette's tone. "Oh, no, of course you ain't no idea of what I mean!"

"Come on, Freddy," Florette broke in quickly. "It's a katzenjammer. He ain't got over last night yet."

She seized Freddy's hand and walked rapidly toward the door. Howard lurched after her, followed by the interested stares of the spectators. On the street he caught up with her and the quarrel recommenced.

The act went badly that afternoon. It must be hard to frolic in midair with a heavy heart. Under cover of the gay music there were angry muttered words and reproaches.

"Yoo-hoo! Yoo-hoo!" Florette would trill happily to the audience as she poised on one toe. "What-ta you tryin' to do—shake me off'n the bar?" she would mutter under her breath to her partner.

"That's right! Leggo o' me an' lemme bus' my bean, damn you!" snarled Howard. And to the audience he sang, "Oh, ain't it great to have a little girlie you can trust for—life!"

They were still muttering angrily as they came off. The handclapping had been faint.

"Aw, for God's sake, stop your jawin'!" half screamed Florette. "It ain't no more my fault than it is yours. If they don' like us they don' like us, tha's all."

She ran up the stairs, sobbing. Howard followed her. They shared a dressing room now. It was small, and Freddy was in the way, although he tried to squeeze himself into the corner by the dingy stationary washstand. Howard shoved Freddy. Florette protested. The quarrelling broke out afresh. Howard tipped over a bottle of liquid white. Florette screamed at him, and he raised his fist. Freddy darted out of his corner.

"Say, ya big stiff, cut out that rough stuff, see?" cried little Freddy in the only language of chivalry that he knew.

Howard whirled upon him furiously, calling him a name that Freddy did not understand, but Florette flung herself between them and caught the blow.

"He certainly looks as if he had fallen asleep," Miss Nellie Blair repeated. "Better run out and get him, Mary. He might tumble off the wall."

As Mary went out a maid came in.

"A gen'l'mun to see you, Miss Blair," she announced.

"Is it a parent?" asked Miss Nellie.

The maid's eyebrows twitched, and she looked faintly grieved, as all good servants do when they are forced to consider someone whom they cannot acknowledge as their superior.

"No, ma'am, he doesn't look like a parent," she com-

plained. "He really is a very queer-lookin' sort of person, ma'am. I wouldn't know exactly where to place him. Shall I say you are out, ma'am?"

"Yes," said Miss Eva. "No doubt he wants to sell an encyclopedia."

"No, let him come in," said Miss Nellie. "It might be a reporter about Madame d'Avala," she added, turning to her sister. "Sometimes they look queer."

"If it turns out to be an encyclopedia I shall leave you at once," said Miss Eva. "You are so kind-hearted that you will look through twenty-four volumes, and miss your dinner——"

But the gentleman who came in carried no books, nor did he look like one who had ever been associated with them. Carefully dressed in the very worst of taste from his scarfpin to his boots, he had evidently just been too carefully shaved, for there were scratches on his wide, ludicrous face, and his smile was as rueful as a clown's.

"The Misses Blair, I presume?" he asked in what was unmistakably his society manner, and he held out a card.

Miss Eva took it and read aloud, "Mr. Bert Brannigan, Brannigan and Bowers, Black-Face Comedians."

"Ah?" murmured Miss Nellie, who was always polite even in the most trying circumstances.

But Miss Eva could only stare at the rich brown suit, the lavender tie and matching socks and handkerchief.

"Well?" said Miss Eva.

Mr. Brannigan cleared his throat and looked cautiously about the room. His heavy, clownlike face was troubled.

"Where's the kid?" he asked in a hoarse whisper.

"What child?" Miss Eva snapped.

"You've come to see one of our pupils?" Miss Nellie faltered.

"Yeah. Hers."

"Hers?"

"W'y, Miss Le Fay's li'l boy."

"Oh, Freddy?"

"Sure! Does he—he don't—you ain't tole 'im yet, have you?"

"Told him what?"

"My God! don't you know?"



Bert Brannigan stared at the ladies, mopping his brow with the lavender handkerchief.

"Please explain yourself, Mr. Brannigan," said Miss Eva.

"She's dead. I thought you knew."

"Miss Le Fay is dead?" gasped Miss Nellie.

"Why weren't we told?" asked Miss Eva.

"It was in the papers," said Bert. "But they didn't give Florette no front-page headlines, an' maybe you don't read the theatrical news."

"No," said Miss Eva.

"Well, not bein' in the profession," Mr. Brannigan said as if he were apologizing for her.

He sat down and continued to mop his brow mechanically. The two sisters stared in dismay at the clown who had brought bad news.

"W'at I don' know is how to tell the kid," said Bert.

"He was nutty about Florette; didn't give a darn for no one else. I bin on the bill with them two lots of times, an' I seen how it was. The money ain't goin' to be no comfort to that kid!"

"The money?"

"Florette's insurance—made out to him. Tha's w'y I come. She wan'ed him to stay on here, see, till he was all educated. They's enough, too. She was always insured heavy for the kid. They's some back money comin' to you, too. She tole me. The reason w'y she didn't sen' it on was because she was out of luck an' broke, see?"

"But why didn't Miss Le Fay write to us?" asked Miss Nellie. "If she was in difficulties we——"

"Naw, Florette wasn't that kind; nev' put up any hard-luck story y' un'erstan'. But she'd bin outa work, sick. An' w'en she come back it looked like her ac' was a frost. I run up on her in K. C., an'——"

"What is K. C.?"

"Why, Kansas City! We was on the bill there two weeks ago. Me an' Florette was ole friends, see? No foolishness, if you know what I mean. I'm a married man myse'f—Bowers there on the card's my wife—but me an' Florette met about five years ago, an' kep' on runnin' on to one another on the bill, first one place an' then another. So she was glad to see me again, an' me her. 'W'y, w'ere's Freddy?' I says,

first thing. An' then I never seen any person's face look so sad. But she begun tellin' me right off w'at a fine place the kid was at, an' how the theayter wasn't no place for a chile. An' she says, 'Bert, I wan' him to stay w'ere he's happy an' safe,' she says. 'Even if I nev' see him again,' she says. Well, it give me the shivers then. Psychic, I guess."

Bert paused, staring into space.

"And then?" Miss Nellie asked gently.

"Well, like I was tellin' you, Florette had been playin' in hard luck. Now I don' know whether you ladies know any-thing about the vodvil game. Some ac's is booked out through the circuit from N' Yawk; others is booked up by some li'l fly-by-night agent, gettin' a date here an' a date there, terrible jumps between stands, see?—and nev' knowin' one week where you're goin' the nex', or whether at all. Well, Florette was gettin' her bookin' that way. An' on that you gotta make good with each house you play, get me? An' somethin' had went wrong with the ac' since I seen it las'. It useter be A Number 1, y' un'erstan', but looked like Florette had lost int'rusted or somethin'. She didn't put no pep into it, if you know what I mean. An' vodvil's gotta be all pep. Then, too, her an' that partner of hers jawin' all the time somethin' fierce. I could hear him raggin' her that af'noon, an' mestandin' in the wings, an' they slipped up on some of their tricks terrible, an' the audience laughed. But not with 'em, at 'em, y' un'erstan'! Well, so the ac' was a fros', an' they was cancelled."

"Cancelled?"

"Fired, I guess you'd call it. They was to play again that night an' then move on, see?"

"Oh, yes."

"An' they didn't have no bookin' ahead. Florette come an' talked to me again, an' she says again she wanted Freddy to be happy, an' git a better start'n she'd had an' all. 'An', Bert,' she says, 'if anything ev' happens to me, you go an' give 'um the money for Freddy,' she says."

"Poor thing! Perhaps she had a premonition of her death," murmured Miss Nellie.

Bert gave her a queer look.

"Yeah—yes, ma'am, p'raps so. I was watchin' her from the wings that night," he went on. "The ac' was almos'

over, an' I couldn't see nothin' wrong. Howard had run off an' Florette was standin' up on the trapeze kissin' her han's like she always done at the finish. But all of a sudden she sort of trem'led an' turned ha'f way roun' like she couldn't make up her min' what to do, an' los' her balance, an' caught holt of a rope—an' let go—an' fell."

Miss Nellie covered her face with her hands. Miss Eva turned away to the window.

"She was dead w'en I got to her," said Bert.

"Be careful!" said Miss Eva sharply. "The child is coming in."

"Freddy wasn't asleep at all," said Mary, opening the door. "He was just playing a game, but he won't tell me—Oh, I beg your pardon! I didn't know any one was here."

Freddy had stopped round-eyed, open-mouthed with incredulous delight.

"Bert!" he gasped. "The son of a gun!"

"Freddy!" cried the Misses Blair.

But Bert held out his arms and Freddy ran into them.

"Gee, Bert, I'm glad to see ya!" rejoiced Freddy.

"Me, too, kid, glad to see you! How's the boy, huh? Gettin' educated, huh? Swell school, ain't it?" babbled Bert, fighting for time.

"Aw, it's all right, I guess," Freddy replied listlessly, glancing at the Misses Blair. Then turning again with eager interest to Bert, "But say, Bert, what in the hell a—I mean what-ta you doin' here?"

"Why—ah—ah—jus' stoppin' by to say howdy, see, an'—"

"Playin' in N'Yawk?"

"No."

"Jus' come in?"

"Yeah."

Freddy drew his breath in quickly.

"Say, Bert, you—you ain't seen Florette anywheres?"

"Why, ye-yeah."

"Where is she, Bert?"

There was a deathly hush.

Then Miss Eva motioned to Miss Nellie and said, "If you will excuse us, Mr. Brannigan, we have some arrangements to make about the concert to-night. Madame d'Avala is

to sing in the school auditorium, a benefit performance," and she went out, followed by her sister and niece.

"Where's Florette?" Freddy asked again, his voice trembling with eagerness.

"I—seen her in K. C., sonny."

"How's the ac'?"

"Fine! Fine! Great!"

"No kiddin'?"

"No kiddin'."

"Florette—all right?"

"Why, what made you think any different?"

"Who hooks her up now, Bert?"

"She hires the dresser at the theatre."

"I could 'a' kep' on doin' it," said Freddy, with a sigh.

"Aw, now, kid, it's better for you here, gettin' educated an' all."

"I don't like it, Bert."

"You don't like it?"

"Naw."

"You don't like it! After all she done!"

"I hate this ole school. I wanna leave. You tell Florette."

"Aw, now, Freddy——"

"I'm lonesome. I don't like nobody here." His voice dropped. "An'—an' they don't like me."

"Aw, now, Freddy——"

"Maybe Miss Mary does. But Miss Eva don't. Anyway, I ain't no use to anybody here. What's the sense of stayin' where you ain't no use? An' they're always callin' me down. I don't do nothin' right. I can't even talk so's they'll like it. Florette liked the way I talked all right. An' you get what I mean, don't you, Bert? But they don't know nothin'. Why, they don't know nothin', Bert! Why, there's one boy ain't ever been inside a theatre! What-ta you know about that, Bert? Gee, Bert, I'm awful glad you come! I'd 'a' bust not havin' somebody to talk to."

Bert was silent. He still held Freddy in his arms. His heart reeled at the thought of what he must tell the child. He cleared his throat, opened his mouth to speak, but the words would not come.

Freddy chattered on, loosing the flood gates of his accumu-

lated loneliness. He told how Florette had bidden him "learn to be a li'l gem'mum," and how he really tried; but how silly were the rules that governed a gentlemanly existence; how the other li'l gem'mum laughed at him, and talked of things he had never heard of, and never heard of the things he talked of, until at last he had ceased trying to be one of them.

"You tell Florette I gotta leave this place," he concluded firmly. "Bert, now you tell Florette. Will you, Bert? Huh?"

"Freddy—I—— Freddy, lissen now. I got somethin' to tell you."

"What?"

"I—I come on to tell you, Freddy. Tha's why I come out to tell you, see?"

"Well, spit it out," Freddy laughed.

Bert groaned.

"Whassa matter, Bert? What's eatin' you?"

"I—I—— Say, Freddy, lissen—lissen, now, Freddy. I——"

"Florette! She ain't sick? Bert, is Florette sick?"

"No! No, I——"

"You tell me, Bert! If it's bad news about Florette——"

His voice died out. His face grew white. Bert could not meet his eyes.

"No, no, now, Freddy," Bert mumbled, turning away his head. "You got me all wrong. It—it's good news, sonny."

Like a flash Freddy's face cleared.

"What about, Bert? Good news about what?"

"Why—ah—why, the ac's goin' big, like I tole you. An'—an' say, boy, out at one place—out at K. C., it—why, it stopped the show!"

"Stopped the show!" breathed Freddy in awe. "Oh, Bert, we never done that before!"

"An' so—so she—ah, Florette—y'see, kid, account of the ac' goin' so big, why, she—has to—go away—for a little while."

"Go away, Bert! Where?"

"To—to—Englund, an'—Australia."

"To Englund, an'—Australia?"

"Yeah, they booked her up 'count o' the ac' goin' so great."

"Oh, Bert!"

"Yeah. An' lissen. She's booked for fifty-two weeks solid!"

"Fifty-two weeks! Oh, Bert, that ain't never happened to us before!"

"I know. It's—great!"

Bert blew out his breath loudly, mopped his forehead. He could look at Freddy now, and he saw a face all aglow with love and pride.

"When she comin' to get me, Bert?" the child asked confidently.

"Why—why, Freddy—now—you——"

Bert could only flounder and look dismayed.

"She ain't goin' off an' leave me!" wailed the child

"Now, lissen! Say, wait a minute! Lissen!"

"But, Bert! Bert! She——"

"Say, don't you wanna help Florette, now she's got this gran' bookin' an' all?"

"Sure I do, Bert. I wanna he'p her with her quick changes like I useter."

"You he'p her! Say, how would that look in all them swell places she's goin' to? W'y, she'll have a maid!"

"Like the headliners, Bert?"

"Sure!"

"A coon, Bert?"

"Sure! Like a li'l musical com'dy star."

"Honest?"

"Honest!"

"But, Bert, w'y can't I go, too?"

"Aw, now, say—w'y—w'y, you're too big!"

"What-ta y' mean, Bert?"

"W'y, kid, you talk's if you never bin in the p'fession. How ole does Miss Le Fay look? Nineteen, tha's all. But with a great big boy like you taggin' on—— W'y, say, you'd queer her with them English managers right off. You don' wanna do that now, Freddy?"

"No, but I——"

"I knew you'd take it sensible. You always bin a lot of help to Florette."

"Did she tell you, Bert?"

"Sure!"

"A' right. I'll stay. When—when's she comin' to tell me goo'-by?"

"Why—why—look-a-here. Brace up, ole man. She had to leave a'ready."

"She's gone?"

"Say, you don' think bookin' like that can wait, do you? It was take it or leave it—quick. You didn't wan' her to throw away a chancet like that, huh, Freddy? Huh?"

Freddy's head sank on his chest. His hands fell limp. "A' right," he murmured without looking up.

The big man bent over the child clumsily and tried to raise his quivering chin.

"Aw, now, Freddy," he coaxed, "wanna come out with me an'—an' have a soda?"

Freddy shook his head.

"Buy ya some candy, too. Choc'late drops! An' how about one o' them li'l airypine toys I seen in the window down the street? Huh? Or some marbles? Huh? Freddy, le's go buy out this here dinky li'l ole town. What-ta ya say, huh? Le's paint this li'l ole town red! What-ta ya say, sport?"

Freddy managed a feeble smile.

"How come you so flush, Brudder Johnsing?" he asked in what he considered an imitation of darky talk. "Mus' 'a' bin rollin' dem bones!"

"Tha's a boy!" shouted Bert with a great guffaw. "There's a comeback for you! Game! Tha's what I always liked about you, Freddy. You was always game."

"I wanna be game!" said Freddy, stiffening his lips. "You tell Florette. You write to her I was game. Will ya, Bert?"

A bell rang.

"Aw, I gotta go dress for supper, Bert. They dress up for supper here."

"A' right, kid. Then I'll be goin'——"

"Goo'-by, Bert. You tell her, Bert."

"So long, kid."

"Will ya tell her I was game, Bert?"

"Aw, she'll know!"

Madame Margarita d'Avala found herself in a situation all

the more annoying because it was so absurd. She had promised to sing at the Misses Blair's School for the benefit of a popular charity, and she had motored out from New York, leaving her maid to do some errands and to follow by train. But it was eight o'clock and the great Madame d'Avala found herself alone in the prim guest room of the Misses Blair's School, with her bag and dressing case, to be sure, but with no one to help her into the complicated draperies of her gown. There was no bell. She could not very well run down the corridor, half nude, shouting for help, especially as she had no idea of where the Misses Blair kept either themselves or their servants. The Misses Blair had been so fatiguingly polite on her arrival. Perhaps she had been a little abrupt in refusing their many offers of service and saying that she wanted to rest quite alone. Now, of course, they were afraid to come near her. And, besides, they would think that her maid was with her by this time. They had given orders to have Madame d'Avala's maid shown up to her as soon as she arrived, and of course their maid would be too stupid to know that Madame d'Avala's maid had never come.

Margarita d'Avala bit her lips and paced the floor, looked out of the window, opened the door, but there was no one in sight. Well, no help for it. She must try to get into the gown alone. She stepped into it and became entangled in the lace; stepped out again, shook the dress angrily and pushed it on over her head, giving a little impatient scream as she rumbled her hair. Then she reached up and back, straining her arms to push the top snap of the corsage into place. But with the quiet glee of inanimate things the snap immediately snapped out again. Flushing, Madame d'Avala repeated her performance, and the snap repeated its. Madame d'Avala stamped both feet and gave a little gasp of rage. She attacked the belt with no better luck. Chiffon and lace became entangled in hooks, snaps flew out as fast as she could push them in. Her arms ached, and the dress assumed strange humpy outlines as she fastened it up all wrong.

She would like to rip the cursed thing from her shoulders and tear it into a million pieces! She felt hysteria sweeping over her. She knew that she was going to have one of her famous fits of temper in a minute.



"Oh! Oh! Oh!" Madame d'Avala screamed aloud, stamping her feet up and down as fast as they could go. "Oh! Oh! Oh! Damn! Damn! Damn!"

She did not swear in Italian, because she was not an Italian except by profession. Her name had been Maggie Davis, but that was a secret between herself and her press agent.

"Oh! Damn!" screamed Madame d'Avala again.

"Ain't it hell?" remarked an interested voice, and Madame d'Avala saw a small pale face staring at her through the door which she had left ajar.

"Come in!" she ordered, and a small thin boy entered, quite unabashed, looking at her with an air of complete understanding.

"Who are you?" asked Madame d'Avala.

"Freddy."

"Well, Freddy, run at once and find a maid for me, please. Mine hasn't come, and I'm frantic, simply frantic. Well, why don't you go?"

"I'll hook you up," said Freddy.

"You!"

"Sure! I kin do it better'n any maid you'd get in this helluva school."

"Why, Freddy!"

"Aw, I heard you sayin' damn! You're in the p'fession, huh? Me, too."

"You, too?"

His face clouded.

"Oh! And now—you have retired?"

"Yeah—learnin' to be a gem'mum. Lemme there," said Freddy, stepping behind Madame d'Avala. "Say, you've got it all started wrong." He attacked the stubborn hooks with light, deft fingers.

"Why, you can really do it!" cried Madame d'Avala.

"Sure! This ain't nothin'." Freddy's fingers flew.

"Careful of that drapery. It's tricky."

"Say, drapery's pie to me. I fastened up lots harder dresses than this."

"Really?"

"Sure! Florette had swell clo'es. This'n's swell, too. My! ain't it great to see a classy gown again!"

Madame d'Avala laughed and Freddy joined her.

"Say, you seen the teachers at this school?" he asked. "You seen 'em?"

Madame d'Avala nodded.

"Nice ladies," said Freddy in an effort to be fair. "But no class—you know what I mean. Way they slick their hair back, an' no paint or powder. Gee, Florette wouldn't wear their clo'es to a dog fight!"

"Nor I," said Madame d'Avala; "I love dogs."

"I tole Miss Eva she ought to put peroxide in the rinsin' water for her hair like Florette useter, but it made her mad. I b'lieve in a woman fixin' herself up all she can, don't you?" asked Freddy earnestly.

"Indeed, I do! But tell me, who is Florette?"

So Freddy told her all about his mother, and about the good fortune that had come to her.

"Fifty-two weeks solid! Some ac' to get that kinda bookin, huh?" he ended.

"Yes! Oh, yes, indeed!"

"There y'ah now! Look at youse'f! See if it's a'right."

Madame d'Avala turned to the mirror. Her gown fell in serene, lovely folds. It seemed incredible that it was the little demon of a few minutes before.

"Perfect! Freddy, you're a wonder. How can I thank you?"

"Tha's a'right. You're welcome."

He was regarding her with worshipful eyes.

"You're awful pretty," he breathed.

"Thank you," said Madame d'Avala. "Are you coming to my concert?"

"No, they put us to bed!" cried Freddy in disgust. "Puttin' me to bed at 8:30 every night! What-ta y' know about that! Jus' w'en the orchestra would be tunin' up for the evenin' p'formance."

"What a shame! I'd like to have you see my act."

"I bet it's great. You got the looks, too. Tha's what it takes in this p'fession. Make a quick change?"

"No, I wear the same dress all through."

"Oh! Well," he sighed deeply—"well, it's been great to see you, anyway. Goo'-bye."

The great lady bent down to him and kissed his forehead.

"Good-bye, Freddy," she said. "You've helped me so much."

Freddy drew in a long breath.

"M-m," he sighed, "you know how I come to peek in your door like that?"

"Because you heard me screaming 'damn'?"

"No, before that. Comin' all the way down the hall I could smell it. Smelled so nice. Don't none of these ladies use perfume. I jus' knew somebody I'd like was in here soon's I got that smell."

"Oh, Freddy, I like you, too! But I've got to hurry now. Good-bye. And thanks so much, dear."

She started out the door.

"Oh, gee! I can't go to bed!" Freddy wailed.

"Come along, then!" cried Madame d'Avala, impetuously seizing his hand. "I'll make them let you go to the concert. They must!"

They ran down the hall together hand in hand, Freddy directing the way to the Misses Blair's study. Miss Eva and Miss Nellie and Mary were there, and they looked at Freddy compassionately. And though Miss Eva said it was most unusual, Miss Nellie agreed to Madame d'Avala's request.

"For," said gentle Miss Nellie, drawing Madame d'Avala aside and lowering her voice—"for we are very sorry for Freddy now. His mother——"

"Oh, yes, she has gone to England."

"Why, no! She—is dead!"

"Oh, *mio povero bambino!* And how he adores her!"

"Yes."

"And what will he do then?"

"He can stay on here. But I am afraid he doesn't like us," Miss Nellie sighed.

"Has he no one else?"

"No—that is, a stepfather. But his mother put him here to save him from the stepfather's abuse, and—and all the coarsening influences of stage life, if you understand."

"Ah, yes, I understand," said Madame d'Avala. "And yet I think I understand the little one, too. He and I—we have the same nature. We cannot breathe in the too-high altitudes. For us there must be dancing in the valley, laughter and roses, perfume and sunshine—always sunshine."

"Oh—er—yes," replied Miss Nellie, taken aback by this effusiveness, which she could only explain as being foreign.

"It's 8:30," said Miss Eva, looking at her watch.

"Ah, then I must fly," cried Madame d'Avala.

"Goo'-bye!" said Freddy wistfully.

"*Au revoir*," said Madame d'Avala, and electrified the Misses Blair by adding, "See you after the show, kid."

"I am very lonely, too," said Margarita d'Avala after the concert—"lonely and sad."

"You are?" Freddy cried in amazement. Then, practically, "What about?"

"It's about a man," confessed the lady.

"Aw, g'wan!" exclaimed Freddy incredulously. "Say," lowering his voice confidentially, "lemme tell you something! They ain't a man on earth worth crying for."

"How did you know?" asked Margarita.

"Flo—Florette used to say so." Then a cloud passed over his face. "She used to say so," he added.

There was a moment's silence, while the lady watched him. Then Freddy's mobile face cleared, his eyes shone with their old gay confidence.

"Say, I'm tellin' you!" said Freddy, spreading his feet apart, thrusting his hands in his pockets. "I ain't got no use for men a-tall! An' you take my advice—don't bother over 'em!"

Margarita laughed. She laughed so hard that Freddy had joined her, and without knowing how, he was by her side, holding on to her hand while they both rocked with merriment. When they could laugh no more he snuggled up to the shoulder that smelled so nice. His face became babyish and wistful. He stroked the satin of the lovely gown with one timid finger, while his blue eyes implored hers.

"Ladies an' children is nicest, ain't they?" he appealed.

Suddenly the great Margarita d'Avala caught him in her arms and drew him to that warm, beautiful breast where no child's head had ever rested.

"Oh, Freddy, Freddy!" she cried. "You are right, and I must have you!"

"You kin, s' long's Florette's away," said Freddy.

# WILD EARTH

By SOPHIE KERR

*From Saturday Evening Post*

THE big department store so terrified Wesley Dean that he got no farther than five steps beyond the entrance. Crowds of well-dressed ladies milling round like cattle, the noise of many feminine voices, the excessive warmth and the heady odour of powder and perfume—the toilet goods were grouped very near the door—all combined to bewilder and frighten him. He got out before the floorwalker of the centre aisle could so much as ask him what he wanted.

Once outside he stood in the spring wind and meditated. There must be other stores in Baltimore, little ones, where a man could buy things in quiet and decency. Until the four-o'clock motor stage started for Frederick he had nothing to do.

He stuck his hands in his pockets and started down the crowded crookedness of Lexington Street. He reached the market and strolled through it leisurely, feeling very much at home with the meats and vegetables and the good country look of many of the stall keepers. Its size amazed him; but then he'd always heard that Baltimore was a big city, and so many people must take a lot to eat. He went on, all the way through, and after a little hesitation struck down a quiet street to the right. But he saw no shops of the sort he was looking for, and he had thoughts of going back and braving the big store again. He turned again and again, pleased by the orderly rows of red-brick-with-white-trim houses, homey-looking places in spite of their smallness and close setting. At last, right in the middle of a row of these, he saw a large window set in place of the two usual smaller ones, a window filled with unmistakable feminine stuff, and the sign, small, neatly gilt lettered: Miss Tolman's Ladies' Shop. Hemstitching Done.

There wasn't a soul going in or out, so he braved it, and was happier still when he found himself the sole customer. The opening of the door made a bell tinkle in a back room.

A girl came through parted green wool curtains, a girl so flaxen-haired, with such blue eyes—like a friendly kitten—that Wesley Dean almost forgot the errand that had brought him so far.

As for the girl, she was surprised to see a man, and particularly a young country man, among the gloves and stockings, cheap pink underthings, and embroideries of Miss Tolman's shop.

"You got any—any aprons?" he stammered.

"White aprons or gingham?" The girl's smile helped Wesley a great deal. A very nice girl, he decided; but she made him feel queer, light-headed.

"I'm not sure, ma'am. When I come away from home this morning I asked Aunt Dolcey did she need anything, and she said 'yes, a couple of aprons,' but she didn't say what kind."

The girl thought it over. "I reckon maybe if she's your auntie she'd want white aprons."

Her mistake gave him a chance for the conversation which he felt a most surprising wish to make.

"No'm, she's not my auntie. She's the old coloured woman keeps house for me."

Oh, she was a very nice girl; something about the way she held her head made Wesley think of his spunky little riding mare, Teeny.

"H'm. Then I think you'd be safe to get a gingham; anyway, a gingham apron comes in handy to anybody working round a kitchen. We got some nice big ones."

"Aunt Dolcey's not so awful big; not any bigger'n you, but heavier set, like."

There is a distinct advance in friendly intimacy when one has one's size considered in relation to a customer's needs, particularly when the consideration shows how little a man knows about women's garments. The girl reached beneath the counter and brought up an armful of blue-and-white-checked aprons. She unfolded them deftly, and Wesley saw that she had small strong hands and round wrists.

"These got bibs and nice long strings, cover you all up while you're cooking. They're a dollar."

His gaze, intent on her rather than the aprons, brought her eyes to his.

"Good-looking, but country," was her swift appraisal, adding to it, "And what a funny mark he's got on his forehead."

It was true. His young hawklike face, tanned brown by sun and wind, was made strangely grim by a dark vein on his brow, which lent a frowning shadow to his whole visage. Yet the eyes she had looked into were shy and gentle and reassuringly full of open admiration.

"If you think she'll like 'em I'll take two," he said after an instant's pause.

"I'm sure she'll like 'em. They're good gingham and real well made. We don't keep shoddy stuff. You could go into one of the big stores and get aprons for fifty, sixty cents, but they wouldn't be good value."

The soft cadence of her voice gave Wesley a strange and stifled feeling around the heart. He must—he must stay and talk to her. Hardly knowing what he said, he burst into loquacity.

"I did go into one of the big stores, and it sort of scared me—everything so stuffy and heaped up, and such a lot of people. I don't get down to Baltimore very often, you see. I do most of my buying right in Frederick, but I'd broke my disk, and if you send, it's maybe weeks before the implement house will 'tend to you. So I just come down and got the piece, so there won't be but one day lost."

The girl looked up at him again, and he could feel his heart pound against his ribs. This time she was a little wistful.

"They say it's real pretty country out round Frederick. I've never been out of Baltimore, 'cept to go down the bay on excursions—Betterton and Love Point, and places like that. It makes a grand sail in hot weather."

She handed him the package and picked up the two bills he had laid down on the counter. There was plainly no reason for his further lingering. But he had an artful idea.

"Look here—maybe I ought to get Aunt Dolcey a white apron, too. Maybe she won't want the gingham ones at all."

The girl looked surprised at such extravagance.

"But if she doesn't you can bring 'em back when you come to Baltimore again, and we'd exchange 'em," she argued mildly.

"No, I better get a white one now. She puts on a white apron evenings," he added craftily.

A box of white aprons was lifted from the shelf and a choice made, but even that transaction could not last forever, as Wesley Dean was desperately aware.

"Look here, are you Miss Tolman?" he burst out. "I saw the name outside on the window."

"Mercy, no! Miss Tolman's a kind of cousin of mine. She's fifty-two, and she can't hardly get through that door there."

He disregarded the description, for the second bundle was being tied up fast. He had never seen any one tie so fast, he thought.

"My name's Wesley Dean, and I got a farm in the mountains back of Frederick. Say—I don't want you to think I'm fresh, but—but—say, would you go to the movies with me to-night?"

It had come to him in a flash that he could disregard the seat in the four-o'clock bus and go back to-morrow morning. Sweat stood out on his forehead and on his curving, clean-shaven upper lip. His boy's eyes hung on hers, pleading. All the happiness of his life, he felt, waited for this girl's answer, this little yellow-haired girl whom he had never seen until a quarter of an hour before.

"We-ell," she hesitated, "I—I don't like to have you think I'd pick up like this with any fellow that come along——"

"I don't think so!" he broke in fiercely. "If I thought so I'd never've asked you."

There was a strange breathless moment in the tiny cluttered shop, a moment such as some men and women are lucky enough to feel once in a lifetime. It is the moment when the heart's wireless sends its clear message, "This is my woman" and "This is my man." The flaxen-haired girl and the dark boy were caught in the golden magic of it and, half scared, half ecstatic, were thrown into confusion.

"I'll go," she whispered breathlessly. "There's a little park a block down the street. I'll be there at seven o'clock, by the statue."



"I'll be there, waiting for you," he replied, and because he could not bear the strange sweet pain that filled him he plunged out of the shop, jerking the door so that the little bell squealed with surprise. He had forgotten his packages.

Also, as he remembered presently, he did not know her name.

He was at the feet of the statue in the park by half-past six, and spent a restless half hour there in the cool spring twilight. Perhaps she would not come! Perhaps he had frightened her, even as he had frightened himself, by this inexplicable boldness. Other girls passed by, and some of them glanced with a coquettish challenge at the handsome tall youth with his frowning brow. But he did not see them. Presently—and it was just on the stroke of seven—he saw her coming, hesitantly, and with an air of complete and proper primness. She had on a plain little shabby suit and hat, but round her throat was a string of beads of a blue to match her eyes, an enticing, naïve harmony.

She carried the forgotten aprons, and handed them to him gravely.

"You left these," she said; and then, to regularize the situation, "My name's Anita Smithers. I ought 've told you this afternoon, but—I guess I was kind of forgetful, too."

That made them both smile, and the smile left them less shy. He stuffed the forgotten aprons into his overcoat pocket.

"I was so afraid you wouldn't come. Where can we go? I don't know anything much about the city. I'd like to take you to a nice picture show, the best there is."

She flushed with the glory of it.

"There's a real nice picture house only a little ways from here. They got a Pauline Frederick film on. I'm just crazy about Pauline Frederick."

By this time they were walking sedately out of the park, not daring to look at each other. She watched him while he bought the tickets and then a box of caramels from the candy stand inside.

"He knows what to do," she thought proudly. "He's not a bit of a hick."

"D'you go to the pictures a lot?" he asked when they were seated.

"Most every night. I'm just crazy about 'em."

"I expect you've got steady company, then?" The question fairly jerked out of him.

She shook her head. "No, I almost always go by myself. My girl friend, she goes with me sometimes."

He sighed with relief. "They got good picture shows in Frederick. I go 'most every Saturday night."

"But you don't live right in Frederick, you said."

He seized the chance to tell her about himself.

"Oh, my, no. I live back in the mountains. Say, I just wish you could see my place. It's up high, and you can look out, ever so far—everything kind of drops away below, and you can see the river and the woods, and it takes different colours, 'cording to the season and the weather. Some days when I'm ploughing or disking and I get up on the ridge, it's so high up and far away seems like I'm on top the whole world. It's lonesome—it's off the pike, you see—but I like it. Here in the city everything crowds on you so close."

She had listened with the keenest interest.

"That's so. It must be grand to get off by yourself and have plenty room. I get so tired of that squinched-in, narrow, stuffy shop; and the place where I board is worse. I don't make enough to have a room by myself. There's two other girls in with me, and seems like we're always underfoot to each other. And there isn't any parlour, and we got only one bureau for the three of us, and you can guess what a mess that is. And the closet's about as big as a pocket handkerchief."

"Ain't you got any folks?"

The blue eyes held a sudden mist.

"Nobody but Miss Tolman, and she's only a distant cousin. Ma died two years ago. She used to sew, but she wasn't strong, and we never could get ahead."

"My folks are all gone, too."

How little and alone she was, but how much nearer to him her aloneness brought her. He wanted to put his hand over hers and tell her that he would take care of her, that she need never be alone again. But the beginning of the film choked back the words. He poked the box of caramels at her, and she took it, opened it with a murmured "Oh, my, thank you!" Presently they both had sweetly bulging

cheeks. Where their elbows touched on the narrow chair arm made tingling thrills run all over him. Once she gave him an unconscious nudge of excitement.

Out of the corner of his eye he studied her delicate side face as she sat, with her lips parted, intent on the film.

"She's pretty—and she's good," thought Wesley Dean. "I expect she's too good for me."

But that unwontedly humble thought did not alter it a hair's breadth that she must be his. The Deans had their way always. The veins in his wrists and the vein in his forehead beat with his hot purpose. He shifted so that his arm did not touch hers, for he found the nearness of her disturbing; he could not plan or think clearly while she was so close. And he must think clearly.

When the last flicker of the feature was over and the comic and the news had wrung their last laugh and gasp of interest from the crowd, they joined the slow exit of the audience in silence. On the sidewalk, however, she found her voice.

"It was an awful nice picture," she said softly. "'Most the nicest I ever saw."

"Look here, let's go somewhere and have a hot choc'late, or some soda, or ice cream," he broke in hurriedly. He could not let her go with so much yet unsaid. "Or would you like an oyster stew in a reg'lar restaurant? Yes, that'd be better. Come on; it isn't late."

"Well, after all those caramels, I shouldn't think an oyster stew——"

"You can have something else, then." The main thing was to get her at a table opposite him, where they wouldn't have to hurry away. "Let's go in there."

He pointed toward a small restaurant across the street where red candlelights glimmered warmly through panelled lace.

"But that looks like such a stylish place," she protested, even as she let him guide her toward it.

But it was not so stylish when they got inside, and the appearance of the stout woman, evidently both proprietor and cashier, who presided over the scene at a table on a low platform near the door reassured them both. And the red candleshades were only crinkled paper; the lace curtains showed many careful darns. A rebellious boy of fourteen, in

a white jacket and apron, evidently the proprietor's son, came to take their order. After a good bit of urging Anita said that she would take a ham sandwich and a cup of coffee.

Wesley ordered an oyster stew for himself, and coffee, and then grandly added that they would both have vanilla and chocolate ice cream.

"He looks as if he just hated being a waiter," said Anita, indicating the departing boy servitor.

"Sh'd think he would," said Wesley. He put his arms on the table and leaned toward her. "I was going home this afternoon till I saw you. I stayed over just to see you again. I've got to go back in the morning, for I've not got my spring work done; but—you're going with me."

The vein on his forehead heightened his look of desperate determination. He was not so much a suitor as a commander.

"You haven't got any folks and neither have I, so that makes it easy. I'll come for you in the morning, about eight o'clock, and we'll go get a license and get married, and then we can get the ten-o'clock bus out to Frederick. Oh, girl, I never saw any one like you! I—I'll be good to you—I'll take care of you. It don't matter if I didn't ever see you till this afternoon, I'd never find anybody else that I want so much in a hundred thousand years. I've not got a lot of money, but the farm's mine, all free and clear, and if my wheat turns out all right I'll have a thousand dollars' cash outright come the end of the year, even after the taxes are paid and everything. Won't you look at me, Anita—won't you tell me something? Don't you like me?"

The girl had listened with her eyes cast down, her hands nervously picking at the edge of the tablecloth. But he was not mistaken in her. She had wherewith to meet him, and her gaze was honest, without coquetry or evasion.

"Oh, I do like you!" she cried with quick colour. "I do! I do! I always thought somebody like you'd come along some day, just like this, and then—it just seemed foolish to expect it. But look here. I told you a story, right off. My name's not Anita—it's Annie. I took to pretending it's Anita because—it does seem sort of silly, but I got to tell you—because I saw it in the movies, and it seemed sort of cute and different, and Annie's such a plain, common name.

But I couldn't let you go on talking like that and calling me by it, now could I?"

The mutinous young waiter brought their food and thumped it truculently down before them.

"Look out!" said Dean with sudden violent harshness, the vein in his forehead darkening ominously. "What do you think you're doing, feeding cattle?"

The boy drew back in confusion, and Annie exclaimed: "Oh, he didn't mean it anything against us—he's just mad because he has to be a waiter."

"Well, he'd better be careful; kids can be too smart Aleck."

The little gust had deflected them away from their own affairs. But Annie brought them back. She leaned toward him.

"You make me kind of afraid of you. If you ever spoke to me like that it'd just about kill me."

He was contrite. "Why, I couldn't ever speak to you like that, honey; it just made me mad the way he banged things down in front of you. I don't want people to treat you like that."

"And you look so fierce, too—scowling so all the time."

He put up a brown finger and touched his savage vein.

"Now, now—you mustn't mind my look. All the Dean men are marked like that; it's in the blood. It don't mean a thing." He smiled winningly. "I reckon if you're beginning to scold me you're going to marry me, huh?"

Something very sweet and womanly leaped in Annie's blue eyes.

"I—I reckon I am," she said, and then confessed herself a brave adventurer and philosopher in one. "Yes, I'd be a fool to sit round and make excuses and pretend it wouldn't do to be so out of the ordinary when here you are and here I am, and it means—our whole lives. I don't care, either, if I didn't ever set eyes on you till to-day—I know you're all right and that what you say's true. And I feel as if I'd known you for years and years."

"That's the way I felt about you the minute I looked at you. Oh"—he gave a vast and shaking sigh—"I can't hardly believe my luck. Eat up your supper and let's get out of here. Maybe there's some stores open yet and I could buy you a ring."

"And I have to be in my boarding house by half-past ten," offered Annie, "or I'll be locked out. What the girls are going to say when I come in and tell 'em——" She looked at him with intense and piteous question—the question that every woman at the moment of surrender asks sometimes with her lips, but always with her heart: "It is going to be all right, isn't it? And you'll be good to me?"

"So help me God," said young Wesley Dean.

The farm lay high, as Wesley had said. Indeed, all the way from Baltimore they had seemed to be going into the hills, those placidly rounding friendly Maryland hills that rise so softly, so gradually that the traveller is not conscious of ascent. The long straight road dips across them gallantly, a silver band of travel to tie them to the city, with little cities or towns pendent from it at wide intervals. Trees edge it with a fringe of green; poor trees, maimed by the trimmers' saws and shears into twisted caricatures of what a tree should be, because the telegraph wires and telephone wires must pass, and oaks and locusts, pines and maples, must be butchered of their spreading branches to give them room.

It was along this highway that the motor bus, filled with passengers and baggage and driven with considerably more haste than discretion, carried the newly married pair. Annie's eyes grew wide at the wonder and beauty of it. She was not at all afraid. She snuggled her hand into Wes's and loved it—and loved him, too, with his look of pride and joy in her. She was content to be silent and let him talk. Now and then she looked at the little turquoise ring on her finger above the shiny new wedding ring, and loved that, too, for he had chosen it at once from the trayful offered them, blurting out that she must have it because it matched her eyes.

"All this country out here's rich," he bragged, "but Fred'rick County's far the richest land of all. Richest in the state. Maybe richest in the whole United States, I dunno. And all the farms are big. Great big farms—and great big teams to till 'em. People don't use mules here s'much as they do over on the Eastern Shore. And there's not any sand, like there is over there—in spots, that is."

"What's that man doing?" asked Annie alertly.

"Ploughin'. Say, didn't you ever see a man ploughin' before?"

"Only in the movies," said Annie, unabashed. "Do you ever plough?"

He laughed outright.

"Say, you're going to be some little farmer's wife. I can see that. Yes'm, I plough a little now and then. It's like fancywork—awful fascinating—and once you get started you don't want to stop till you get a whole field done."

"Quit kidding."

"Say, Annie, do you know a chicken when you see it walking round? Or a turkey? Or a guinea keet? We got 'em all. Aunt Dolcey, she takes care of 'em."

"I'd like to take care of 'em. I'll feed 'em, if she'll show me how."

"Aunt Dolcey 'll show you. She'll be tickled to death to have somebody feed 'em when she's got the mis'ry."

At Frederick they left the big motor bus and got into Wes's own rackets flivver, the possession of which delighted Annie's heart.

"My land, I never thought I'd get married to a man that owned an automobile," she confessed with flattering frankness in her voice.

"This ain't an automobile," said Wes. "It's a coffeepot, and an awful mean one. Sometimes she won't boil, no matter what I do."

The coffeepot on this particular day chose to boil. They rattled merrily out of Frederick and off into the higher hills beyond. It was a little after noon when they reached the farm.

They had had to turn off the pike and take a winding wood road, rough and muddy from the spring rains. All through the budding green of the trees dogwood had hung out white bridal garlands for them, and there were violets in all the little mossy hollows. At last they came through to the clearing, where lay the farm, right on the ridge, its fields smiling in the sun, a truce of Nature with man's energy and persistence. Yet not a final truce. For all around, the woods crept up to the open and thrust in tentative fingers—tiny pine trees, sprouts and seedlings of hardwood, scraps of underbrush—all trying to gain a foothold and even when cut and over-

turned by the sharp plough still clinging tenaciously to their feeble rooting.

"It looks somehow," said Annie, vaguely understanding this, "as if the trees and things were just waiting to climb over the walls."

"And that's what they are," said Wesley Dean. "The time I put in grubbing! Well—let's go in and see Aunt Dolcey."

He had told her, coming out, that he was afraid she would find the house sort of plain, but just the space of it delighted her. The rooms were bare and square, whitewashed exquisitely, the furniture dark old cherry and walnut of a style three generations past.

There were no blinds or curtains, and in the streaming sunlight Annie could see that everything was clean and polished to the last flicker of high light. Here and there were bits of colour—crimson and blue in the rag carpet, golden brass candlesticks on the mantel, a red-beaded mat on the table under the lamp, the lamp itself clear glass and filled with red kerosene that happily repeated the tint of the mat. It all pleased Annie, touching some hitherto untwanged chord of beauty in her nature. And there was about it the unmistakable atmosphere of home.

"Old-fashioned but sort of swell, too," she decided. "Looks kind of like some of the parlours of those old houses on Charles Street that I used to rubber into in the evenings when the lights were lit and they'd forgot to put the blinds down."

She liked the impassive almost Egyptian face of Aunt Dolcey, too. The old coloured woman had received her with a serious regard but friendly.

"Mist' Wes, he stahle me mighty frequen', but he nevah stahle me with no marryin' befo'," she said. "Honey, it'll be mighty nice to have a pret' young gal in de house. I'll serve you de bes' I kin, faithful an' stiddy, like I always serve him. Ef I'd 'a' known you was a-comin' I'd sho' had somethin' fo' dinneh to-day besides greens an' po'k, cracklin' pone an' apple dumplin's. That's nuffin' fo' a weddin' dinneh."

But when they came to eat it, it was delicious—the greens delicately seasoned, not greasy, the salt pork home-cured and



sweet, the cracklin' pone crumbling with richness, and the apple dumpling a delight of spicy flavour.

They sat opposite each other, in as matter-of-fact fashion as if they had been married for years. They were young and exceedingly hungry, and hunger destroys self-consciousness.

The china was very old—white plates with a curving pattern of blue leaves and yellow berries. The knives and forks were polished steel with horn handles. The spoons were silver; old handmade rat-tail spoons they were, with the mark of the smith's mallet still upon them and the initials W. D. cut in uneven letters.

"Those were my great-granddad's," said Wesley. "Same name as mine. He had 'em made out of silver money by a man down in Frederick. They must be nearly a hundred years old. My great-granddad, he was the man that bought this land and began to clear it. He wanted to be away off from everybody."

"Why?" asked Annie, interested in the story.

The vein on Wesley's forehead seemed to grow larger and darker as he answered:

"Oh, he got into trouble—knocked a man down, and the fellow struck his head on a stone and died. It didn't come to trial—it really was an accident—but it didn't make granddad popular. Not that he cared. He was a hard-headed, hard-fisted old son of a gun, if there ever was one, according to the stories they tell about him."

"What were they fighting about?"

"Oh, I dunno—granddad was high-tempered, and this fellow was sort of smart Aleck; give him some lip about something and dared him to touch him. And quick's a wink granddad punched him. At least that's the way I always heard it. Prob'ly they'd both been taking too much hard cider. Bring me another dumplin', Aunt Dolcey, please."

As the old woman entered, bringing the dumpling, Annie fancied there were both warning and sympathy in her eyes. Why, she couldn't imagine. In a moment she forgot it, for Wesley was looking at her hard.

"It's funny," he said, "to think I only saw you yesterday, and that we got married this morning. Seems as if you'd been here for years and years. Does it seem awful strange to you, honey?"

"No," said Annie. "No, it doesn't. It is queer, but all the way here, and when I come into the house, I had a sense of having been here before sometime; kind of as if it was my home all along and I hadn't known about it."

"So it was—and if I hadn't ever met you I'd been an old bach all my life."

"Yes, you would."

"Yes, I wouldn't."

They were both laughing now. He got up and stretched himself.

"Well, Mrs. Dean," he said, "I gotta go out and fix my disker, and you gotta come along. I don't want to let you out of my sight. You might fly off somewhere, and I'd never find you again."

"Don't you worry about that. You couldn't lose me if you tried."

They went through the kitchen, and there a tall gaunt old coloured man rose and bowed respectfully. He and Aunt Dolcey were having their own dinner at the kitchen table.

"This here's Unc' Zenas," said Wesley. "He's Aunt Dolcey's husband, and helps me on the place."

And again Annie saw, this time in the old man's eyes, the flicker of sympathy and apprehension that she had marked in Aunt Dolcey's.

"And right glad to welcome y', Missy," said Unc' Zenas. "We didn' 'spect Marse Wes to bring home a wife whenas he lef', but that ain' no sign that it ain' a mighty fine thing."

They went out into the mellow spring day. Wesley Dean, now in his blue overalls and working shirt, became a king in his own domain, a part of the fair primitiveness about them. It was as if he had sprung from this dark fertile soil, was made of its elements, at one with it. Here he belonged, and the very spring of the earth beneath his feet was repeated in the measured beating of his blood. The land could not warp or break him, as it does so many, for he belonged to it as essentially and as completely as it belonged to him. Dimly the little town girl beside him felt this, and dimly she hoped that she, too, might prove to be of the same mould.

"Look at the barn, and the stables, and the corncrib," he was saying. "See how they're all built? Hand-hewn logs chinked with plaster. Great-granddad built them all,

helped by his two slaves. That's all the slaves he had, just two, and one of 'em was Unc' Zenas's grandfather. Everything's strong and sound as the day he finished it."

"That one looks newer," said Annie, pointing.

Wesley looked a little shamefaced, as does every typical Anglo-Saxon discovered in sentiment.

"I built that," he confessed. "It's a chicken house. Somehow I didn't want to go down to the sawmill and get planks and build with 'em 'mongst all these old log things. So I got the logs out in the woods and built same as great-granddad. Maybe it was foolish, but I couldn't help it."

"It wasn't foolish; it was nice," she affirmed.

She perched on the tongue of a wagon while he mended the disk, dividing her attention between him and the live things of the barnyard. A string of decorative white ducks marched in single file about the edge of the cow pound. Beyond them a proud red-wattled cock paraded and purred among his harem of trim hens, now and then disturbed in his dignity by the darting nervousness of a pair of malicious guineas, acknowledged brigands of the feathered tribes. Trim iridescent pigeons toddled about on their coral feet, looking for leftovers from the chickens' table.

"Say, Wes, I should think you'd have a dog," she said suddenly. "A nice big dog lazying round here would sort of complete it."

He bent suddenly over his disk and gave the nut he was working on a mighty twist, but he had tossed aside his hat, and she could see the sudden jump and darkening of his menacing vein.

"I had a dog," he said in a low voice, "but he died."

A curious restraint fell on them, and for the first time Annie felt herself an alien, a stranger, far adrift from familiar shores. She shivered in the light wind.

"You cold? You better go in the house and get something round you," Wes said to her.

"I guess I'd better." And she left him hammering.

In the house she found Aunt Dolcey in the big bedroom over the living room. She had just finished remaking the bed—an old maple four-poster, the wood a soft and mellowed orange, fine and colourful against the white quilt, the lace-edged pillow slips.

"I put on clean sheets," said Aunt Dolcey as Annie hesitated on the threshold. "Yes'm, I put on everything clean, an' the bes'. I know what's fitten. My chile, dish yer de third bridal bed I made up for wives of de Dean men."

Something caught in Annie's throat, terrified her. This old black woman, with her remoteness, her pitying wise eyes, what did she mean? Annie wanted terribly to ask her. But how begin? How get through this wall of inscrutability which the black and yellow races have raised for their protection?

She fluttered nearer to the old woman.

"Look," she began tremulously—"look—it's all right, isn't it, my marrying him so quick? I haven't got any folks, and—and I suppose I haven't got much sense; but there was something about him that just made me trust him and—and want him. But it was all so quick, and—now I'm here it seems like maybe—there was—something— Oh, you'd tell me, wouldn't you? It is all right, isn't it?"

The old woman considered. "It's all right ef you're all right," she pronounced at length.

"But—but what do you mean? And—and look here— Aunt Dolcey—tell me—what'd he do to that dog he had?"

"What you know 'bout any dog?"

"I don't know—anything; but when I asked him why he didn't have a dog—he was queer. It scared me."

"Doan be skeered. They ain' nuffin' to be skeered of 'bout Marse Wes. Eve'ything all right ef you got patience, an' ef you got sense, an' ef you got haht enough. Sperrit an' sense go far, but the haht gwine carry you froo. Now I said my say"—her tone mellowed into unctuous kindness—"what you want, Missy? Som'n Aun' Dolcey c'n fotch you? Temme what it is, f'r I got to be up an' erbout my wuk. I got er weddin' cake to mek yit this ebenin'. Yes, ma'am—I gwi' mek you weddin' cake fill de bigges' pan in de kitchen."

She helped Annie rummage in her trunk and get out the sweater she had come in for, and it was not until the girl was running back to the barns that she realized Aunt Dolcey had not answered her question. But the old woman's words had steadied her, reassured her.

And Wes received her gayly. His repairs were done, his team in harness, ready to start.

"It's a shame," he said. "We ought to go off down to town and play round and have a big time, but I'm so behind with my disking, Annie, honey. You see I had to stay over a day in Baltimore. Fact. Important business." He winked at her jocosely. "So I've got to work rest of the day. That's what comes of marrying a farmer. Farm work don't even wait on a bride, not even the prettiest bride in the world."

He stooped to kiss her, and she held tight to his arm.

"I don't mind. You go on about your business and I'll get all unpacked and settled. But don't be late to supper—Aunt Dolcey's making us a wedding cake."

She watched him as he drove down the lane and turned into the field and steadied the first straining rush of his team. Again she felt her abandonment, her utter forlornity, her distance from everything she had known and been accustomed to. But once more she proved herself an adventurer and a philosopher.

Shrugging her shoulders, she turned back to the house.

"It may be a funny way to get married; but everything's all right until it stops being all right, and—and I like it here."

She had been married a week now, and the week had been the fairest of fair weather, indoors as well as out. Now she sat at the clumsy old secretary desk to write a letter to Miss Tolman.

. . . For all you said, and hought I was crazy, I am just as happy as I can be. Wes is kind and full of fun, and he works very hard. This farm is a pretty place, and the house is ten times as big as your shop. I am learning to cook and churn butter, and Aunt Dolcey, the old coloured woman, teaches me and doesn't laugh when I am dumb. She says, and Wes does, too, that I am a born farmer's wife, and I think maybe I am, for I like it in the country more than I ever thought I'd like any place, and I don't get a bit lonely. You ought to see our wheat—it's like green satin, only prettier.

I hope the rheumatism in your hands is better, and that you have got somebody good in my place. Cousin Lorena, I am a very lucky girl to fall in love with such a nice man, with a piece of property and a flivver, even if it is an old one; but better than all that he has is Wes himself, for you never saw a better, kinder man. He is not rough and does not chew tobacco as you thought maybe he did, only smokes a pipe once in a while. I made a sweet-potato custard yesterday, and he said it was the best he ever tasted. He says I must not do anything that is too hard for me, but

I am going to drop seed corn. We have been down to town once, and went to the movies and bought some candy, and he wanted to buy me a new hat, but I wouldn't let him. He is so kind. . . .

She had written in a glow of happiness, trying to tell everything and finding it hard to get it into words that would allay Cousin Lorena's forebodings and impress her properly. Annie frowned at the paper. How inform a bilious, middle-aged prophet of evil that she had not only wedded prosperity and industry but also a glorious young demigod whose tenderness and goodness passed belief?

Suddenly she heard a voice, loud, angry, incoherent. She dropped the pen and ran out to the kitchen door.

Wes stood there, confronting Uncle Zenas—a Wes she had never dreamed could exist. The vein on his forehead was black and swollen; indeed his whole face was distorted with rage.

"You damned old liar—don't you tell me again you put that pitchfork away when I found it myself in the stable behind the mare's stall. Pretty business if she'd knocked it down and run one of the tines into her."

"Marse Wes, you haddat pitchfo'k dere yo'se'f dis mawnin'; I ain't nevah touch dat pitchfo'k." Unc' Zenas's voice was low and even.

Behind Wes's back Aunt Dolcey made signs to her husband for silence.

"I tell you you're a liar, and by rights I ought to cut your lying tongue out of your head! I haven't even seen that pitchfork for three days, and when I went to look for it just now I found it in the stable where you'd had it cleaning out the stalls. Now shut up and get out about your work! Don't let me hear another word out of you!"

Unc' Zenas turned away and Wes, without a word or look at the two women, strode after him. Annie, shaken, caught Aunt Dolcey's arm.

"Oh, Aunt Dolcey," she breathed, "what on earth was the matter?"

Aunt Dolcey drew her into the kitchen.

"Nuffin' but Marse Wes flyin' int' one his bad Dean temper fits, honey," said the old woman. "No use to min' him. No use payin' any 'tention. Dat why I waggle my head at

Zenas to say nuffin' back. Talk back to Marse Wes when he's high-flyin' on'y meks things worse."

Annie beheld an abyss yawning beneath her feet.

"Yes, but, Aunt Dolcey—what's the sense in talking that way? It wasn't anything, just a pitchfork out of place. And he went on so. And he looked so dreadful."

Aunt Dolcey rattled her pans.

"I been dreadin' dis moment, whenas you firs' see Marse Wes in his anger. Zenas an' me, we's use to it. Marse Wes dataway; som'n go wrong he fly off de handle. Zenas ain't mislay no pitchfo'k—I seed Marse Wes mahse'f wid dat pitchfo'k dis mawnin'. But eve'y once in a while he git a temper fit an' blow off he mouf like dat. Sometimes he strike somebuddy—but he doan often strike Zenas. Sometimes he git mad at oner de hosses an' frail it proper. Dat high temper run in de Dean fambly, chile. Dey gits mad, an' dey flies off, an' you just got to stan' it."

"But does he—does he get over it quick?"

The old negress shook her head.

"He'll be mighty quiet come suppeh-time, not talkin' much, lookin' dahk. Walk light, an' don't say nuffin' rile him up, eve'ything all right. T'-morrow mawnin' come, he's outer it." Her voice rose into a minor cadence, almost a chant. "Chile, it's a dahk shadder on all de Deans—dey all mahked wid dat frown on deir foreheads, an' dey all got dahk hours come to um. Marse Wes's maw she fade out an' die caze she cain' stan' no such. His grammaw, she leave his grampaw. An' so on back. Ontell some ooman marry a Dean who kin chase dat debbil outer him, jes so long de Dean men lib in de shadder. I tole you, ain' I, de day you come, sperrit an' sense carry you fur, but it's de haht gwine carry you froo. Now you un'stan'."

Yes, Annie understood, imperfectly. So might Red Riding Hood have understood when the wolf suddenly appeared beside her peaceful pathway. She asked one more question, "Does he get mad often?" and waited, trembling, for the answer.

Aunt Dolcey stuck out her underlip. "Sometime he do, en den again, sometime he doan'. Mos' giner'ly he do."

Annie walked back to her letter, and looked at its last phrase. She picked up the pen, but did not write.

Then with a quick intake of breath she took her first conscious step in the path of loyal wifehood.

She added, writing fast: "He is the best man that ever lived, I do believe," and signed her name, folded the letter and sealed it in its envelope as quickly as she could.

At supper she watched Wes. He was, as Aunt Dolcey had predicted, very silent; the vein in his forehead still twitched menacingly and the pupils of his eyes were distended until the colour about them disappeared in blackness. After he had eaten he went outside and smoked, while Annie sat fiddling with a bit of sewing and dreading she knew not what.

But nothing happened. Presently he came in, announced that he was tired and had a hard day before him to-morrow, and thought he'd go to bed.

Long after he had fallen into immobile slumber Annie lay beside him, awake, marvelling how suddenly he had become a stranger, almost an ogre. Yet she loved him and yearned to him. The impulse that had made her finish the letter to Cousin Lorena in the same spirit in which she had begun it called her to pity and help him. She must conceal his weakness from their world. She listened to his deep, regular breathing, she put her hand against his hard palm.

"I'm his wife," thought Annie Dean with inarticulate tenderness. "I'm going to try to be everything a wife ought to be."

The next morning he was his old self again, laughing, joking, teasing her as usual. The scene of yesterday seemed to have gone utterly from his memory, though he must have known that she had seen and heard it. But he made no allusion to it, nor did she. The farm work was pressing; the warm spring days foretold an early season.

As he went whistling out toward the barn Annie heard him salute Unc' Zenas with familiar friendliness:

"How's tricks this morning? Think the Jersey'll be fresh next week?"

Aunt Dolcey heard him, too, and she and Annie exchanged long glances. The old woman's said, "You see—what I told you was true"; and the young woman's answered, "Yes, I see, and I understand. I'm going to see it through."

But something in her youth had definitely vanished, as it



always does when responsibility lays its heavy hand on us. She went about her new life questioningly eager for understanding. There was so much for her to see and learn—the erratic ways of setting hens, the care of foolish little baby chicks; the spring house, cool and damp and gray-walled, with its trickle of cold water forever eddying about the crocks of cream-topped milk; the garden making, left to her and Aunt Dolcey after the first spading; the various messes and mashes to be prepared for cows with calf; the use of the stored vegetables and fruits, and meat dried and salted in such generous quantity that she marvelled at it. All the farm woman's primer she learned, bit by bit, seeing how it supplemented and harmonized with that life of the fields that so engrossed and commanded Wes.

But through it all, beneath it all, she found herself waiting, with dread, for another outburst. Against whom would it be this time—Unc' Zenas again—Aunt Dolcey—one of the animals—or perhaps herself? She wondered if she could bear it if he turned on her.

She was working in the spring house mixing cream with curd for cottage cheese, very busy and anxious over it, for this was her first essay alone, when she heard Wes again in anger. She dropped her spoon, but did not go to look, only concentrated herself to listen.

This time he was cursing one of his horses, and she could hear the stinging whish of a whip, a wicked and sinister emphasis to the beast's snorting and frenzied thumping of hoofs. Her blue eyes dilated with fear; she knew in what pain and fright the horse must be lunging under those blows. And Wes, raucous, violent, his mouth foul with unclean words—only this morning he had told her that when Sunday came they'd go into the woods and find a wild clematis to plant beside the front door. Wild clematis! She could have laughed at the irony of it.

At last she could bear it no longer; she put her hands to her ears to shut out the hideousness of it. After an interminable wait she took them down. He had stopped—there was silence—but she heard footsteps outside, and she literally cowered into the darkest corner of the spring house. But it was only Aunt Dolcey, her lips set in a line of endurance.

"I was lookin' erbout foh you, honey," she said reassur-

ingly. "I di'n' know where you was, en den I remembah you come off down heah. Let Aunt Dolcey finish up dat cheese."

"What—what started him?" asked Annie piteously.

"I doan' jes' know—sound' like one de big team di'n' go inter his right stall, er som'n like dat. It's always som'n triflin', en no 'count. But land, he'll be ovah it come night. Doan' look so white en skeer, chile."

"But—but I been thinking—what if he might turn on me—what if he'd strike me? Aunt Dolcey—did he ever strike you?"

"Oncet."

"Oh, Aunt Dolcey, what did you do?"

Something flared in Aunt Dolcey's eyes that was as old as her race. She looked past Annie as if she saw something she rather relished; just so her ancestors must have looked when they were dancing before a bloodstained Congo fetish.

"You see dat big white scar on Marse Wes' lef' wris'? When he struck me I mahk him dere wid my hot flatiron. Ain' no man eveh gwine lif' his hand to Dolcey, no matter who."

A shrewd question came to Annie:

"Aunt Dolcey, did he ever strike you again?"

"No, ma'am, no 'ndeedy, he didn'. Wil' Marse Wes may be, but he ain' no crazy man. It's dat ole debbil in his nature, Miss Annie, honey. En ef ever once som'n tremenjus happen to Marse Wes, dat debbil 'll be cas' out. But hit's got to be stronger en mo' pow'ful dan he is. Not 'ligion, fer 'ligion goes f'm de outside in. Som'n got to come from inside Marse Wes out befo' dat ole debbil is laid."

This was meagre comfort, and Annie did not follow the primitive psychology of it. She only knew that into her happiness there had come again the darkening of a fear, fear that was to be her devil, no less terrible because his presence was for the most part veiled.

But again she steeled her courage. "I won't let him spoil everything; I won't let him make me afraid of him," she vowed, seeing Wes in his silent mood that night. "I won't be afraid of him. I wish I could cut that old vein out of his forehead. I hate it—it's just as if it was the thing that starts him. Never seems as if it was part of the real Wes, my Wes."

In the depths of the woods, on Sunday, she stood by while

he dug up the wild clematis—stood so he could not see her lips quiver—and she put her clenched hands behind her for fear they, too, would betray her.

"Wes," she asked, "what made you get so mad last Thursday and beat old Pomp so?"

He turned toward her in genuine surprise.

"I wasn't mad; not much, that is. And all I laid on Pomp's tough old hide couldn't hurt him. He's as mean as a mule, that old scoundrel. Gets me riled every once in a while."

"I wish you wouldn't ever do it again. It scared me almost to death."

"Scared you!" he laughed. "Oh, Annie, you little silly—you aren't scared of me. Now don't let on you are. What you doing—trying to kid me? There, ain't that a splendid plant? I believe I'll take back a couple shovelfuls this rich wood earth to put in under it. It'll never know it's not at home."

"Yes, but, Wes—I wish you'd promise me something."

"Promise you anything."

"Then—promise me not to get mad and beat the horses any more or holler at Unc' Zenas. I don't like it."

"Annie, you little simp—what's the matter with you? A fellow's got to let off steam once in a while, and if you'd been pestered like I have with Unc' Zenas's ornery trifling spells and old Pomp's general cussedness, you'd wonder that I don't get mad and stay mad every minute. Don't let's talk any more about it. Say, look there—there's a scarlet tanager! Ain't it pretty? Shyest bird there is, but up here in the woods there's a couple pairs 'most every year. Pull that old newspaper up round the earth a little, so's I can get a better holt of it. That's the girl. Gee, I never knew what fun it'd be to have a wife who'd be so darn chummy as you are. How d'you like your husband, Mrs. Dean? Ain't it about time you said something nice to the poor feller instead of scolding his lights and liver out of place on a nice peaceful Sabbath day? You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

She pushed back the fear devil and answered his smile.

"No, sir, I'm not going to say anything nice to my husband. I'll tell you a secret about him—he's awful stuck on himself now."

"Why shouldn't he be? Look who he picked out to marry."

Who could stand against such beguiling? Annie looked up at him and saw his Dean mark give a little mocking twitch, as if it rejoiced in her thwarting.

But she said no more; and they planted the wild clematis with its black woods earth beneath at the side of the front door, and Annie twisted its pliable green stems round one of the posts of the little benched entrance.

Her hands moved deftly, and Wes, who had finished firming the earth about the plant, watched them.

"Your little paws are gettin' awful brown," he said. "I remember that first day, in the shop, how white they were—and how quick they moved. You wrapped up them aprons like somethin' was after you, and I was trying to get my nerve up to speak to you."

"Tryin' to get up your nerve! I reckon it wasn't much effort. There, don't that vine look's if it grew there of itself?"

"Yeh—it looks fine." He sat down on the bench and pulled her down beside him, his arm about her. "Annie, baby, are y' happy?"

She put her cheek against his shoulder and shut her eyes.

"I'm so happy I wouldn't darst be any happier."

"You're not sorry you picked up with me so quick? You don't wish't you'd stayed down in Balt'mer and got you a city beau?"

"I'd rather be with you—here—than any place in the world. And, Wes—I think you're the best and kindest man that ever lived. I wouldn't have you changed, any way, one little bit."

She defied her fears and that mocking, twitching vein with the words.

"Same here. Made to order for me, you were. First minute I looked in those round blue eyes of yours I knew it."

"It isn't possible," she thought. "It isn't possible that he can get so mad and be so dreadful. Maybe if I can make him think he's awful good and kind"—oh, simple subtlety—"he'll believe he is, too, and he'll stop getting such spells. Oh, if he would always be just like this!"

But it was only two days later when she called him to help her; there was a hen that was possessed to brood, and Aunt

Dolcey had declared that it was too late, that summer chickens never thrived.

"I can't get her out, Wes," said Annie. "She's 'way in under the stable, and she pecks at me so mean. You got longer arms'n me—you reach in and grab her."

He came, smiling. He reached in and grabbed, and the incensed biddy pecked viciously.

In a flash his anger was on him. He snatched again, and this time brought out the creature and dropped her with wrung neck, a mass of quivering feathers and horribly jerking feet, before Annie.

"I reckon that'll learn the old crow!" he snarled, and strode away.

"We might 's well have soup for supper," remarked Aunt Dolcey, coming on the scene a moment later. "Dere, chile, what's a chicken, anyway?"

"It's not that," said Annie briefly; "but he makes me afraid of him. If I get too afraid of him I'll stop caring anything about him. I don't want to do that."

"Den," answered Aunt Dolcey with equal brevity, "you got think up some manner er means to dribe his debbil out. Like I done tol' you."

"Yes, but——"

Aunt Dolcey paused, holding the carcass of the chicken in her hands, and faced her.

"Dishyer ain' nuthin'. Wait tell he gits one his still spells, whenas he doan' speak ter nobody an' doan' do no work. Why ain' we got no seed potatoes? Marse Wes he took a contrairy spell an' he wouldn't dig 'em, an' he wouldn't let Zenas tech 'em needer. Me, I went out moonlight nights an' dug some to eat an' hid 'em in de cellar. Miss Annie, you doan' know nuffin' erbout de Dean temper yit."

They went silently to the house. Aunt Dolcey stopped in the kitchen and Annie went on into the living room. There on the walls hung the pictures of Wes's father and mother, cabinet photographs framed square in light wood. Annie looked at those pictured faces in accusing inquiry. Why had they bequeathed Wes such a legacy? In his father's face, despite the beard that was the fashion of those days, there was the same unmistakable pride and passion of Wes to-day. And his mother was a meek woman who could not live and

endure the Dean temper. Well, Annie was not going to be meek. She thought with satisfaction of Aunt Dolcey and the hot flatiron. The fact that he had never lifted finger to Aunt Dolcey again proved that if one person could thus conquer him, so might another. Was she, his wife, to be less resourceful, less self-respecting than that old Negro woman? Was she to endure what Aunt Dolcey would not?

Suddenly she snatched out the little old family album from its place in the top of the desk secretary, an old-fashioned affair bound in shabby brown leather with two gilt clasps. Here were more pictures of the Dean line—his grandfather, more bearded than his father, his Dean vein even more prominent; his grandmother, another meek woman.

"Probably the old wretch beat her," thought Annie angrily.

Another page and here was great-grandfather himself, in middle age, his picture—a faded daguerreotype—showing him in his Sunday best, but plainly in no Sunday mood. "Looks like a pirate," was Annie's comment. There was no picture of great-grandmother. "Probably he killed her off too young, before she had time to get her picture taken." And Annie's eyes darted blue fire at the supposed culprit. She shook her brown little fist at him. "You started all this," she said aloud. "You began it. If you'd had a wife who'd've stood up to you you'd never got drunk and killed a man, and you wouldn't have left your family a nasty old mad vein in the middle of their foreheads, looking perfectly un-Christian. I just wish I had you here, you old scoundrel! I'll bet I'd tell you something that'd make your ears smart."

She banged to the album and put it in its place.

"Well, not me!" said Annie. "Not me! I'm not going to be bullied and scared to death by any man with a bad temper, and the very next time Mister Wes flies off the handle and raises Cain I'm going to raise Cain, two to his one. I won't be scared! I won't be a little gump and take such actions off any man. We'll see!"

It is easy enough to be bold and resolute and threaten a picture. It is easy enough to plot action either before or after the need for it arises. But when it comes to raising Cain two to your husband's one, and that husband has been a long

and successful cultivator of that particular crop—why, that is quite a different thing.

Besides, as it happened, Annie did not wholly lack sympathy for his next outburst, which was directed toward a tramp, a bold dirty creature who appeared one morning at the kitchen door and asked for food.

"You two Janes all by your lonesome here?" he asked, stepping in.

Wes had come into the house for another shirt—he had split the one he was wearing in a mighty bout with the grubbing hoe—and he entered the kitchen from the inner door just in time to catch the words.

He leaped and struck in one movement, and it carried the tramp and himself outside on the grass of the drying yard. The tramp was a burly man, and after the surprise of the attack he attempted to fight. He might as well have battled with a locomotive going full speed.

"What you doin' way up here, you lousy loafer?" demanded Wes between blows. "Get to hell out of here before I kill you, like you deserve, comin' into my house and scarin' women. I've a great mind to get my gun and blow you full of holes."

In two minutes the tramp was running full speed toward the road, followed by Wes, who assisted his flight with kicks whenever he could reach him. After twenty minutes or so the victor came back. His eyes were red with rage that possessed him. He did not stop to speak, but hurried out his rickety little car and was gone. Later they found out he had overtaken the tramp, fought him again, knocked him out, and then, roping him, had taken him to the nearest constable and seen him committed to jail.

But the encounter left him strange and silent for a week, and his Dean mark twitched and leaped in triumph. During that time the only notice he took of Annie was to teach her to use his rifle.

"Another tramp comes round, shoot him," he commanded.

"En in de meantime," counselled Aunt Dolcey, "it'll come in mighty handy fer you to kill off some deseyer chicken hawks what makin' so free wid our nex' crap br'ilers."

But beyond the learning how to use the gun Annie had learned something more: she added it to her knowledge that

Aunt Dolcey had once outfaced that tyrant. It was this—that Wes's rage was the same, whether the cause of it was real or imaginary.

The advancing summer, with its sultriness, its sudden evening storms shot through with flaming lightning and reverberant with the drums of thunder, brought to Annie a cessation of her purpose. She was languid, subject to whimsical desires and appetites, at times a prey to sudden nervous tears. The household work slipped back into Aunt Dolcey's faithful hands, save now and then when Annie felt more buoyant and instinct with life and energy than she had ever felt before. Then she would weed her garden or churn and print a dozen rolls of butter with a keen and vivid delight in her activity.

In the evening she and Wes walked down the long lane and looked at the wheat, wide level green plains already turning yellow; or at the corn, regiments of tall soldiers, each shako tipped with a feathery tassel. Beyond lay the woods—dark, mysterious. Little dim plants of the soil bloomed and shed faint scent along the pathway in the dewy twilight. Sometimes they sat under the wild clematis, flowering now, and that, too, was perfumed, a wild and tangy scent that did not cloy. They did not talk very much, but he was tender with her, and his fits of anger seemed forgotten.

When they did talk it was usually about the crops—the wheat. It was wonderful heavy wheat. It was the best wheat in all the neighbourhood. Occasionally they took out the little coffeepot and drove through the country and looked at other wheat, but there was none so fine as theirs.

And with the money it would bring—the golden wheat turned into gold—they would—— And now came endless dreams.

"I thought we'd sell the old coffeepot to the junkman and get a brand-new car, a good one, but now——" This was Wes.

"I think we ought to save, too. A boy'll need so many things."

"Girls don't need anything much, I suppose—oh, no!" He touched her cheek with gentle fingers.

"It's not going to be a girl."

"How d'you know?"



"I know."

So went their talk, over and over, an endless garland of happy conjectures, plans, air castles. Cousin Lorena sent little patterns and thin scraps of material, tiny laces, blue ribbons.

"I told her blue—blue's for boys," said Annie. And Wes laughed at her. It was all a blessed interlude of peace and expectancy.

The wheat was ready for harvest. From her place under the clematis vine, where she sat with her sewing, Annie could see the fields of pale gold, ready for the reaper. Wes had taken the coffeepot and gone down to the valley to see when the threshers would be able to come. In the morning he would begin to cut. Annie cocked a questioning eye at the sky, for she had already learned to watch the farmer's greatest ally and enemy—weather.

"If this good spell of weather only holds until he gets it all cut!" She remembered stories he had told her of sudden storms that flattened the ripe grain to the ground, beyond saving; of long-continued rains that mildewed it as it stood in the shocks. But if the good weather held! And there was not a cloud in the sky, nor any of those faint signs by which changing winds or clouds are forecast.

She heard the rattle and clack of the returning coffeepot, boiling up the hill at an unwonted speed. And she waved her hand to Wes as he came past; but he was bent over the wheel and did not even look round for her, only banged the little car round to the back furiously. Something in his attitude warned her, and she felt the old almost-forgotten devil of her fear leap to clutch her heart.

Presently he came round the house, and she hardly dared to look at him; she could not ask. But there was no need. He flung his hat on the ground before her with a gesture of frantic violence. When he spoke the words came in a ferment of fury:

"That skunk of a Harrison says he won't bring the thresher up here this year; claims the road's too rough and bridges are too weak for the engine."

"Oh, Wes—what'll you do?"

"Do! I'm not going to do anything! I'm not going to

haul my wheat down to him—I'll see him in hell and back again before I will."

"But our wheat!"

"The wheat can rot in the fields! I won't be bossed and blackguarded by any dirty little runt that thinks because he owns the only threshing outfit in the neighbourhood that he can run my affairs."

He raged up and down, adding invective, vituperation.

"But you can't, Wes—you can't let the wheat go to waste." For Annie had absorbed the sound creed of the country, that to waste foodstuff is a crime as heinous as murder.

"Can't I? Well, we'll see about that!"

She recognized from his tone that she had been wrong to protest; she had confirmed him in his purpose. She picked up her sewing and tried with unsteady fingers to go on with it, but she could not see the stitches for her tears. He couldn't mean it—and yet, what if he should? She looked up and out toward those still fields of precious ore, dimming under the purple shadows of twilight, and saw them a black tangle of wanton desolation. The story Aunt Dolcey had told her about the potatoes of last year was ominous in her mind.

He was sitting opposite her now, his head in his hands, brooding, sullen, the implacable vein in his forehead swollen with triumph, something brutish and hard dimming his clean and gallant youth.

"That's the way he's going to look as he gets older," thought Annie with a touch of prescience. "He's going to change into somebody else—little by little. This is the worst spell he's ever had. And all this mean blood's going to live again in my child. It goes on and on and on."

She leaned against the porch seat and struggled against the sickness of it.

"I might stand it for myself," she thought. "I might stand it for myself; but I'm not going to stand it for my baby. I'll do something—I'll take him away."

Her thoughts ran on hysterically, round and round in a coil that had no end and no beginning.

The silent fit was on Wes now. Presently, she knew, he would get up and stalk away to bed without a word. And in the morning—

It was as she expected. Without a word to her he got up

and went inside, and she heard him going up the stairs. She sat then a little longer, for the night was still and warm and beautiful, the stars very near, and the soft hush-h of the country solitude comforting to her distress.

Then she heard Unc' Zenas and Dolcey talking at the kitchen door, their voices a faint cadenced murmur; and this reminded her that she was not quite alone. She slipped round to them.

"Unc' Zenas, Wes says he's not going to cut the wheat; he'll let it rot in the fields. Seems Harrison won't send his thresher up this far; wants us to haul to him instead."

"Marse Wes say he ain' gwine cut dat good wheat? Oh, no, Miss Annie, he cain' mean dat, sholy, sholy!"

"He said it. He's got an awful spell this time. Unc' Zenas—look—couldn't you ride the reaper if he wouldn't? Couldn't you? Once the wheat gets cut there's some chance."

"Befo' my God, Miss Annie, wid deseyer wuffless ole han's I cain' ha'dly hol' one hawss, let alone three. Oh, if I had back my stren'th lak I useter!"

The three fell into hopeless silence.

"Are the bridges so bad? Is it too hard to get the thresher up here?" asked Annie at last. "Or was that just Harrison's excuse?"

"No, ma'am; he's got de rights. Dem ole bridges might go down mos' any time. An' dishyer road up yere, it mighty hard to navigate foh er grea' big hebby contraption lak er threshin' machine en er engine. Mos' eve'y year he gits stuck. Las' year tuk er day en er ha'f to git him out. No'm; he's got de rights."

"Yes, but, Unc' Zenas, that wheat mustn't be left go to waste."

Aunt Dolcey spoke up. "Miss Annie, honey, go git your res'—mawnin' brings light. Maybe Marse Wes'll come to his solid senses een de mawnin'. You cain' do nuffin' ter-night noway."

"No, that's so." She sighed hopelessly. "Unc' Zenas, maybe we could hire somebody else to cut the wheat if he won't."

"Miss Annie, honey, eve'ybody busy wid his own wheat—an', moreover, Marse Wes ain' gwi' let any stranger come on dis place an' cut his wheat—you know he ain'."

There seemed nothing more to say. In the darkness tears were slowly trickling down Annie's cheeks, and she could not stop them.

"Well—good-night."

"Good-night, my lamb, good-night. I gwi' name you en your tribulations in my prayers dis night."

She had never felt so abandoned, so alone. She could not even make the effort to force herself to believe that Wes would not commit this crime against all Nature; instead, she had a vivid and complete certainty that he would. She went over it and over it, lying in stubborn troubled wakefulness. She put it in clear if simple terms. If Wes persisted in his petty childish anger and wasted this wheat, it meant that they could not save the money that they had intended for the child that was coming. They would have, in fact, hardly more than their bare living left them. The ridiculous futility of it swept her from one mood to another, from courage to utter hopelessness. She remembered the first time that she had seen Wes angry, and how she had lain awake then and wondered, and dreaded. She remembered how, later, she had planned to manage him, to control him. And she had done nothing. Now it had come to this, that her child would be born in needless impoverishment; and, worse, born with the Dean curse full upon him. She clenched and unclenched her hands. The poverty she might bear, but the other was beyond her power to endure. Sleep came to her at last as a blessed anodyne.

In the first moment of the sunlit morning she forgot her trouble, but instantly she remembered, and she dressed in an agony of apprehension and wonder. Wes was gone, as was usual, for he got up before she did, to feed his cattle. She hurried into her clothes and came down, to find him stamping in to breakfast, and with the first glance at him her hope fell like a plummet.

He did mean it—he did! He did not mean to cut that wheat. She watched him as he ate, and that fine-spun desperation that comes when courage alone is not enough. that purpose that does the impossible, took hold of her.

When he had finished his silent meal he went leisurely out to the little front porch and sat down. She followed him.

"Wes Dean, you going to cut that wheat?" she demanded;

and she did not know the sound of her own voice, so high and shrill it was.

The vein in his forehead leered at her. What was she to pit her strength against a mood like this? He did not answer, did not even look at her.

"Do you mean to say you'd be so wicked—such a fool?" she went on.

Now he looked up at her with furious, threatening eyes.

"Shut your mouth and go in!" he said.

She did not move. "If you ain't going to cut it—then I am!"

She turned and started through the house, and he leaped up and followed her. In the kitchen he overtook her.

"You stay where you are! You don't go out of this house this day!" He laid a rough, restraining hand on her shoulder.

At that touch—the first harshness she had ever felt from him—something hot and flaming leaped through her. She whirled away from him and caught up Aunt Dolcey's big sharp butcher knife lying on the table; lifted it.

"You put your hands on me like that again and I'll kill you!" Her voice was not high and shrill now; she did not even raise it. "You and your getting mad! You and your rotten, filthy temper! You'd waste that wheat because you haven't got enough sense to see what a big fool you are."

She dropped the knife and walked past him, out of the kitchen, to the barn.

"Unc' Zenas," she called, "you hitch up the horses to the reaper. I'm going to cut that near field to-day myself."

"But, Miss Annie——" began the old man.

"You hitch up that team," she said. "If there ain't any men round this place, I don't know's it makes so much difference."

She waited while the three big horses were brought out and hitched to the reaper, and then she mounted grimly to the seat. She did not even look around to see if Wes might be watching. She did not answer when Unc' Zenas offered a word of direction.

"Let dat nigh horse swing round de cornahs by hisse'f, Miss Annie. He knows. An' look—here's how you drop de knife. I'll let down de bars an' foller you."

Behind her back he made frantic gestures to Dolcey to

come to him, and she ran, shuffling, shaken. Together they followed the little figure in the blue calico dress, perched high on the rattling, clacking reaper. Her hair shone in the sun like the wheat.

The near horse knew the game, knew how to lead the others. That was Annie's salvation. As she swung into the field she had a struggle with the knife, but it dropped into place, and the first of the golden harvest fell before it squarely, cleanly; the stubble was even behind it. She watched the broad backs of her team, a woman in a dream. She did not know how she drove them; the lines were heavy in her hands, dragged at her arms. It was hot, and sweat rolled down her forehead. She wished vaguely that she had remembered to put on her sunbonnet.

Behind her came Unc' Zenas and Aunt Dolcey, setting the sheaves into compact, well-capped stooks, little rough golden castles to dot this field of amazing conflict.

And now the reaper had come to the corner. Unc' Zenas straightened himself and watched anxiously. But his faith in the near horse was justified—the team turned smoothly, Annie lifted the blade and dropped it, and they started again, only half visible now across the tall grain.

Annie's wrists and back ached unbearably, the sweat got in her eyes, but she drove on. She thought a little of Wes, and how he had looked when she picked up that butcher knife. She thought of his heavy hand on her shoulder, and her flesh burned where he had grasped it.

"I'm going to cut this wheat if it kills me," she said over and over to herself in a queer refrain. "I'm going to cut this wheat if it kills me!" She thought probably it would. But she drove on.

She made her second corner successfully, and now the sun was at her back, and that gave her a little ease. This wheat was going to be cut, and hauled to the thrasher, and sold in the market, if she did every bit of the work herself. She would show Wes Dean! Let him try to stop her—if he dared!

And there would be money enough for everything the baby might want or might need. Her child should not be born to poverty and skimping. If only the sun didn't beat so hard on the back of her neck! If only her arms didn't ache so!

After countless hours of time she overtook Dolcey and Zenas, and the old woman divined her chief discomfort. She snatched the sunbonnet off her own head and handed it up to her.

"Marster in hebben, ef I only had my stren'th!" muttered Zenas as she went on.

"Angels b'arin' dat chile up wid deir wings," chanted Aunt Dolcey. Then, descending to more mundane matters, she added a delighted chuckle: "I knowed she'd rise en shine one dese days. Holler at Marse Wes she did, name him names, plenty. Yessuh—laid him out!"

"What you s'pose he up to now?" asked Zenas, looking over his shoulder.

"I dunno—but I bet you he plumb da'nted. Zenas, lak I tol' you—man may hab plenty debbilment, rip en t'ar, but he'll stan' back whenas a ooman meks up her min' she stood enough." And Aunt Dolcey had never heard of Rudyard Kipling's famous line.

"Dat chile might kill he'se'f."

"When yo' mad yo' kin 'complish de onpossible, en it doan' hurt yo'," replied Dolcey, thus going Kipling one better.

But she watched Annie anxiously.

The girl held out, though the jolting and shaking racked her excruciatingly and the pull of the reins seemed to drag the very flesh from her bones. Now and then the golden field swam dark before her eyes, the backs of the horses swelled to giant size and blotted out the sun. But she kept on long after her physical strength was gone; her endurance held her. Slowly, carefully, the machine went round and round the field, and the two bent old figures followed.

And so they came to mid-morning. They had long since ceased to look or care for any sign of the young master of the land. None of them noticed him, coming slowly, slowly from the stables, coming slowly, slowly to the field's edge and standing there, watching with unbelieving, sullen eyes the progress of the reaper, the wavering arms that guided the horses, the little shaken blue figure that sat high in the driver's seat. But he was there.

It is said of criminals that a confession can often be extracted by the endless repetition of one question alone; they cannot bear the pressure of its monotony. Perhaps it was

the monotony of the measured rattle and clack of the machine going on so steadily that finally impelled Wes Dean, after his long frowning survey of the scene, to vault the low stone wall and approach it.

Annie did not check the horses when she saw him; she did not even look at him. But he looked at her, and in her white face, with the dreary circles of utter fatigue shadowing her eyes, his defeat was completed. He put his hand on the bit of the nearest horse and stopped the team.

Then she looked at him, as one looks at a loathsome stranger.

"What you want?" she asked coldly.

He swallowed hard. "Annie—I'll—I'll cut the wheat, le'me lift you down off there." He held out his arms.

She did not budge. "You going to cut it all—and haul it down to the thresher?"

"Yes—yes, I will. Gee, you look near dead—get down, honey. You go in the house and lay down—I'm afraid you'll kill yourself. I'm afraid you'll hurt—him some way."

Still she did not move. "I'd ruther be dead than live with a man that acts like you do," she said. "Grown up, and can't handle his temper."

Something in her quiet, cold scorn struck through to him and cut away forever his childish satisfaction with himself. A new manhood came into his face; his twitching, sinister vein was still. Surrender choked him, but he managed to get it out:

"I know I acted like a fool. But I can't let you do this. I'll—I'll try to——"

The words died on his lips and he leaped forward in time to catch her as she swayed and fell, fainting.

An hour later Annie lay on the lounge in the sitting room, still aching with terrible weariness, but divinely content. Far away she could hear the steady susurrus of the reaper, driven against the golden wheat, and the sound was a promise and a song to her ears. She looked up now and then at the pictured face of Wes's father, frowning and passionate, and the faint smile of a conqueror curved her tired mouth. For she had found and proved the strongest thing in the world, and she would never again know fear.



# THE TRIBUTE

By HARRY ANABLE KNIFFIN

*From Brief Stories*

THE Little Chap reached up a chubby hand to the door-knob. A few persistent tugs and twists and it turned in his grasp. Slowly pushing the door open, he stood hesitating on the threshold of the studio.

The Big Chap looked up from his easel by the window. His gray eyes kindled into a kindly smile, its welcoming effect offset by an admonitory headshake. "Not now, Son," he said. "I'm busy."

"Can't I stay a little while, Daddy?" The sturdy little legs carried their owner across the floor as he spoke. "I'll be quiet, like—like I was asleep."

The Big Chap hesitated, looking first at his canvas and then at the small replica of himself standing before him.

"I got on my new pants," the youngster was saying, conversationally easing the embarrassment of a possible capitulation. "Mummy says I ought to be proud of them, and because I'm five years old."

The artist looked gravely down at him. "Proud, Son?" he asked, in the peculiar way he had of reasoning with the Little Chap. "Have you reached the age of five because of anything you have done? Or did you acquire the trousers with money you earned?"

The Little Chap looked up at him questioningly. He had inherited his father's wide gray eyes, and at present their expression was troubled. Then, evidently seeking a more easily comprehended topic, his eyes left his father's and sought the canvas on which was depicted a court scene of mediæval times. "Who is that, Daddy?" His small index finger pointed to the most prominent figure in the painting.

His father continued to regard him thoughtfully. "One of England's proud kings, Son."

"And what did *he* do to be proud of?" came quickly from the youthful inquisitioner.

A hearty laugh escaped the artist. "Bully for you, Son! That's a poser! Aside from taxing the poor and having enemies beheaded, I'm puzzled to know what he really did do to earn his high position."

The Little Chap squirmed himself between his father's knees and started to scale the heights to his lap, where he finally settled down with a sigh of comfort. "Tell me a story about him," he said eagerly. "A story with castles, 'n' wars, 'n' everything."

The artist's gaze rested on the kingly figure in the picture, then wandered away to the window through which he seemed to lose himself in scenes of a far-distant time.

"I'll tell you a story, Son," he began, slowly and ruminatingly, "of how Loyalty and Service stormed the Stronghold of Honour and Splendour. This proud king you see in the picture lived part of the time in the great castle of Windsor, and the balance of the year in Saint James's Palace in London."

"It must have cost him a lot for rent," wisely interpolated the Little Chap.

"No, the people paid the rent, Son. Some of them were glad to do it, for they looked upon their king as a superior being. Among this class of loyal subjects was an old hatter, very poor and humble."

"What was his name?" asked the Little Chap, apparently greatly interested.

"He had no name. People in those olden days were known by their trade or calling. So he was simply called 'the hatter'."

"And did he make nice hats?"

"I've no doubt he did, Son. But you mustn't interrupt. Well, the hatter paid his tithes, or taxes, after which, I dare say, he had little enough left to live on. But he appeared not to mind. And whenever the King and Queen rode through the streets in their gilded coach of state, his cracked old voice would cheer lustily, and his hoary head would be bared in deepest reverence."

"Didn't he ever catch cold?"

"Hush, Son, I'm telling a story! As the hatter grew older he lost his wits and became quite crazy on the subject of his king. He yearned to do something to prove his loyalty. And whenever England engaged in a war, and a proclamation was issued calling for men to fight for King and country, he would be one of the first to volunteer. But they never accepted him, of course, because he was so old.

"With the passing of the years the Queen died, and the King decided to marry again. Great preparations for the ceremony were begun at Westminster Abbey, where the wedding was to take place. The old hatter became greatly excited when he heard the news. His addled wits presently hit upon a wonderful scheme by which he could both honour and serve his sovereign: *He would make the King a hat to wear at his wedding!*"

"I guess he must 've been a good hatter, after all," the Little Chap murmured, in a tone of conviction.

"Perhaps, in his time," his father conceded. "But you must remember he now was old and foolish. His materials were merely such odds and ends as he could gather together, and the result was very disreputable-looking. But in his rheumy old eyes it was the most wonderful hat ever designed for a monarch. He carefully wrapped it in a soiled old cloth and started out to present it to the King. At the palace gates the guards refused him admittance, and cruelly laughed in his face. He tried every means he could think of to have the hat reach its destination. Once he stopped the Court Chamberlain on the street, only to be rebuked for his pains. Another time he waylaid a peer, as he left the House of Lords, and was threatened with arrest. Foiled in all his attempts, the cracked-brained old fellow impatiently awaited the wedding ceremony. At last the great day arrived. All the bells of old London were ringing blithely as the gilded coach, drawn by ten white horses, deposited the King at Westminster Abbey. In the forefront of the vast throng surrounding the entrance stood the hatter."

"And did he have the hat with him?" asked the Little Chap.

"Yes, Son, he had it with him. And when the King entered the portals of the ancient Abbey, the hatter somehow

broke through the line of guards and ran after him crying, 'Your Majesty! Your Majesty! Deign to accept this token of a loyal subject's regard!'

"The King turned in surprise. And when he saw the ragged old fellow tending him the ridiculous-looking hat, he flew into a great rage and cried angrily: 'How comes this varlet here, interrupting his Sovereign's nuptials and desecrating our Tomb of Kings? Away with him to prison, and let him repent his insolence as he rots in a dungeon!'"

"Why did he do that, Daddy?"

"The Sovereign, Son, was a very proud king, while the hatter was both poor and humble. And at his words the guards hurried forward and hustled the old man out of the Abbey, where his presence was an insult to the Great. In the struggle the hat rolled into the gutter, and one of the King's white horses put his hoof through it. The hatter cried like a child when he saw the work of his loving hands thus ruined. But they carried him off to prison and kept him shut up there until he died and paid the penalty for his crime of desecrating the Abbey."

"Oh, the poor old hatter! But is that the end of the story, Daddy?" The Little Chap's disappointment was markedly pronounced.

"No, Son, there is a little more to come. I meant to tell you that the hatter had reared a large family of boys. His sons all married and, in turn, raised large families. These numerous relatives or kin took the name of Hatterskin. In course of time that became shortened to Hatkins, and so remained until the British habit of dropping their H's reduced it to Atkins.

"At last the proud King died and was buried with great ceremony in the Abbey. Year followed year, and century succeeded century. England, although blessed with a Royal pair both humane and good, was ruled by an even wiser monarch—the Sovereign People.

"Then came an August day when the black thunder-cloud of war darkened her smiling horizon. Four bloody, terrible years the conflict lasted. And when at last an armistice was signed, the stricken people went wild with joy."

The Big Chap's gaze returned to the canvas with its scene of mediæval splendour. A mystic light smouldered in his

eyes as, unconscious of his surroundings and his youthful auditor, he continued: "On the second anniversary of that happy day an unprecedented thing happened. Before the ancient Abbey a gun carriage, bearing the flag-draped casket of an unidentified warrior, came to rest on the very spot where the gilded coach of the proud King once had stopped. Again the square was crowded, as on that day in the long ago when the poor hatter foolishly tried to honour his sovereign. The traditions of centuries toppled when the body of the unknown soldier passed through those storied portals followed by the King of England as chief mourner. In the dim, historic chapel the king stood, in advance of princes, prime ministers, and the famous leaders of both army and navy. Like the humble hatter of old his royal head was reverently bared as the nameless hero was laid among the silent company of England's illustrious dead. 'The Boast of Heraldry and the Pomp of Power' bowed in silent homage before the remains of a once common soldier. Thus Loyalty and Service eventually stormed the Stronghold of Honour and Splendour!"

For a moment there was an impressive, brooding silence, broken presently by the Little Chap. "And what was the soldier's name, Daddy?"

Recalled from his reverie, the father answered:

*"He was known, Son, as Tommy Atkins."*

The Little Chap's brow was puckered in thought. At last he laughed delightedly and clapped his hands. "Was the soldier, Daddy, one of the hatter's family—the poor old hatter who was thrown out of the Abbey?"

The Big Chap lifted the child from his lap and placed him on his feet. Then he picked up a brush and turned to his painting.

"I like to think so, Son. But only God knows."

# THE GETAWAY

By O. F. LEWIS

*From Red Book*

OLD Man Anderson, the lifer, and Detroit Jim, the best second-story man east of the Mississippi, lay panting side by side in the pitch-dark dugout, six feet beneath the surface of the prison yard. They knew their exact position to be twenty feet south of the north wall, and, therefore, thirty feet south of the slate sidewalk outside the north wall.

It had taken the twain three months and twenty-one days to achieve the dugout. Although there was always a guard somewhere on the north wall, the particular spot where the dugout had come into being was sheltered from the wall-guard's observation by a small tool-house. Also whenever the pair were able to dig, which was only at intervals, a bunch of convicts was always perched on the heap of dirt from various legitimate excavations within the yard, which Fate had piled up at that precise spot. The earth from the dugout and the earth from these other diggings mixed admirably.

Nor, likewise because of the dirt-pile, could any one detect the job from the south end of the yard. If a guard appeared from around the mat-shop or coming out of the Principal Keeper's office, the convicts sunning themselves on the dirt-pile in the free hour of noon, or late in the afternoon, after the shops had closed, spoke with motionless lips to the two diggers. Plenty of time was thus afforded to shove a couple of boards over the aperture, kick dirt over the boards, and even push a barrow over the dugout's entrance—and there you were!

One minute before this narrative opens, on July 17th, a third convict had dropped the boards over the hole into which Old Man Anderson, the lifer, and Detroit Jim, had crawled. This convict had then frantically kicked dirt over the boards,

had clawed down still more dirt, to make sure no hing could be seen of the hole—had made the thing look ju t like part of the big dirt-pile indeed—and then had legged it to the ball-game now in progress on this midsummer Saturday afternoon, at the extreme south end of the yard, behind the mat-shop.

Dirt trickled down upon the gray hair of Old Man Anderson in the dark and stuffy hole he shared with his younger companion. But the darkness and the stuffiness and the filtering dirt were unsensed. Something far more momentous was in the minds of both. How soon would Slattery, the prison guard, whom they knew to be lying dead in the alley between the foundry and the tool-shop, be found? For years Slattery had been a fairly good friend to Old Man Anderson, but what did that count in the face of his becoming, for all his friendship, a last-minute and totally unexpected impediment to the get-away? He had turned into the alley just when Old Man Anderson and Detroit Jim were crouching for the final jump to the dugout! A blow—a thud—that was all. . . .

Anderson lay now, staring wide-eyed into the black nothing of the hole. For the second time he had killed a man, and God knew he hadn't intended to—either time! Fourteen years ago a man had tried to get his wife away from him, while he was serving a one-year bit in the county jail. Both men had had guns, and Old Man Anderson had killed the other or he would have been killed himself. So that was no murder at all! And as for Slattery—big, heavy, slow-moving, red-faced Slattery—Old Man Anderson would even have gone out of his way to do the guard a favour, under ordinary circumstances. But as between Slattery and the chance to escape—that was different.

Old Man Anderson rubbed his right hand in the dirt and held it before his eyes in the blackness. He knew that the moisture on it was Slattery's blood. The iron pipe in Old Man Anderson's hands had struck Slattery on the head just once, but once was enough.

Old Man Anderson burst into hiccoughing sobs. The younger convict punched him in the ribs, and swore at him in muffled tones. Anderson stifled his sobs then, but continued to snifle and shiver. This time it would absolutely be The Chair for him—if they got him! In a few minutes they couldn't help discovering Slattery. Anderson never could

give himself up now, however this business of the dugout and the hoped-for old sewer conduit should finally turn out. In the beginning he had counted on crawling out, if worst came to worst, and surrendering. But to crawl out now meant but one thing—The Chair!

In all his fourteen years behind the walls the vision of The Chair had terrorized the old man. When they had sent him to prison his first cell had been in the death-house, separated from The Chair only by a corridor that, they told him, was about twenty feet long, and took no more than five seconds to traverse—with the priest. Until they changed his cell, the gaunt, terrible Thing in the next room edged every day nearer, nearer, nearer, looming, growing, broadening before his morbid vision until it seemed to have cut off from his sight everything else in the world—closer, closer until it was only seven incredible hours away! Then had come the commutation of his sentence from death to life!

The next day Old Man Anderson, gray-haired even then, went out from the death-house among his gray-clad fellows, but straight into the prison hospital, where for three months he lay a victim of chair-shock just as surely as was ever a man shell-shocked on the Flanders front. And never since had the hands of the man wholly ceased to quiver and to shake.

Now he was a murderer for the second time! In the blackness he stretched out his hand, and ran it over a stack of tin cans. Detroit Jim had been mighty clever! Canned food from the storehouse, enough to last perhaps two weeks! Detroit Jim had had a storehouse job. Twice a day, during the last ten days, the wiry little ferret-faced second-story man had got away with at least one can from the prison commissary. Also he had provided matches, candles, and even a cranky little flashlight. Only chewing tobacco, because you can smell smoke a long way when you are hunting escaped convicts. And a can of water half the size of an ash can!

Despair fastened upon Old Man Anderson, and a wave of sickness swept over him. All the food in the world wouldn't bring Slattery back to life. And again that Thing in the death-house rose before his mind's eyes. Throughout all the years he had carried a kind of dread that some time a governor might come along who would put back his sentence where it had been at first—and then all his good behaviour in these



endless years would count for nothing. Until Detroit Jim had told him about the long-forgotten sewer conduit, he had never even thought to disobey the prison rules.

The old man's teeth chattered. Detroit Jim's thin fingers tugged at his sleeve. That meant getting busy, and digging with the pick with the sawed-off handle. So Anderson wriggled into the horizontal chamber, which was just large enough to permit his body and arms to function.

As he hacked away at the damp earth, he could see in the pitch darkness the dirty sheet of paper, now in Detroit Jim's pocket, upon which their very life depended. It was a tracing made by a discharged convict from a dusty leather-covered book in the public library in New York, sent in by the underground to Jim. The book had contained the report of some forgotten architect, back in the fifties of the last century, and the diagram in his report showed the water and sewage conduit—in use! It ran from the prison building, right down across the yard, six feet under ground, and out under the north wall, under the street outside, and finally into the river. Built of brick, four feet wide, four feet high. A ready-made tunnel to freedom!

Old Man Anderson could hear Detroit Jim's hoarse whisper now, as he chopped away at the dirt, which he shoved back under his stomach, to where Jim's fingers caught it and thrust it farther back.

"We're only a couple of feet from that old conduit right now. Dig, you son of a gun, dig! Can the sniffin'! You dig, and then I'll dig!"

They were saving their matches and candles against necessity. Mechanically the old man chopped and hacked at the wall of earth in front of him. Now and then the pick would encounter a stone or some other hard substance. In the last few days they had come upon frequent pieces of old brick. Detroit Jim had rejoiced over these signs. For the old man every falling clod of earth seemed to bring him nearer to freedom. They also took his mind off Slattery.

So he chopped away, how long he did not know. Suddenly his pick struck an obstacle again. He hacked at it. It gave slightly. A third time he struck it, and it seemed to recede. An odour of mouldy air filled his nostrils. In that little aperture his pick touched nothing now! He heard

something fall! Then he knew! There was a hollow place in front of them! The abandoned conduit? He stifled a shout.

From somewhere, muffled at first, but ultimately faintly strident, rose a prolonged wail that seemed to issue from the very earth. The sound rose, and fell, and rose again. Frantically the pick of Old Man Anderson hacked away at the dirt, and then at whatever was in front of him. Detroit Jim snapped the feeble flashlight then. It was a wall—the conduit wall!

Meantime, the prison siren shrieked out to the countryside the news of an escape.

What time it was—whether night or day or what day, neither Jim nor Old Man Anderson knew. They had slept, of course, and Jim had forgotten to wind his watch. Had one week or two weeks passed? If two weeks had slipped by and if the prison officers ran true to form they would by now have ceased searching inside the prison walls.

Old Man Anderson and Detroit Jim huddled close to each other in the darkness of the conduit. A hundred times they had crawled from one end to the other of their vaultlike trap! In their desperate and fruitless search for an outlet to the conduit they had burned many matches and several candles. Besides, Old Man Anderson had required light in which to fight off his attacks of nerves, and the last of the candles had gone for that. Now total darkness enveloped them.

The conduit was blocked! By earth at one end, and by a brick wall at the other! All along the winding hundred feet of vault they had hacked out brick after brick only to encounter solid earth behind. Only a few tins of food remained and the water was wholly gone; the liquid from the food cans only served to increase their thirst.

Old Man Anderson had grown to loathe Detroit Jim. Every word he murmured, every movement he made, intensified the loathing. He had made up his mind that Jim was planning to desert him the next time he should fall asleep; perhaps would kill him and leave him there—in the dark. The two had practically ceased speaking to each other. In his mental confusion Old Man Anderson kept revolving in his mind, with satisfaction, a new plan he had evolved. The next time Jim should fall asleep he would crawl back through the aperture

in the conduit wall, pry up the boards over the opening into the prison yard, wriggle out, and take his chances in getting over the wall somehow! Better even be shot by a guard than die like a rat in this unspeakable place, as he was doing, where he couldn't stand up and dared not lie down on account of the things that were forever crawling through the place! His contemplation of his plan was broken in upon by his companion clutching him spasmodically by the arm. The old man's cry died in his throat.

Footsteps! Dull and distant they were, and somewhere above them—momentarily more distinct—receding—gone!

Detroit Jim pulled Anderson's head toward him, and whispered:

"Sidewalk! People going by! We've never sat right here before! We wouldn't hear them if they weren't walking on stone, or slate, or something hard!"

The old man's heart pounded like a trip-hammer. Detroit Jim seized the pick and began to pry the bricks loose from the arched roof of the conduit. They worked like mad, picking, hacking, pulling, piling the bricks softly down on the conduit floor.

Once, for an instant, Jim stopped working. "How far from the hole we came in through, do you think we are?" he whispered.

"'Bout a hundred feet, I guess," answered the old man. "Why?"

Without replying Detroit Jim resumed his picking, picking, at the bricks. A hundred feet from where they had entered would not be under the sidewalk. Finally, he understood. This conduit wound around a good deal; it would take a hundred winding feet to cover thirty straightaway.

Finally, also, Detroit Jim turned the pick over to the old man, who, feeling in the blackness with his hands, discovered the span as wide as his outstretched arms, from which Detroit Jim had removed the bricks. It was a span of yielding earth into which the old man now dug his pick. As he worked, the loosened dirt fell upon him, upon his head, into his eyes and nose and ears. . . .

Abruptly the old man's pick struck the flagging above them! Detroit Jim mounted upon the pile of bricks and shoved Anderson aside.

Jim felt along the edges of the stone clear around. It seemed to measure about three feet by two, and to be of slate, and probably held in place only by its contact with other stones, or by cement between the stones. No light appeared through the crevices. Detroit Jim took from his pocket a huge pocket-knife and with the longest blade poked up between the main stone and the one adjoining. The blade met resistance.

Ultimately, and abruptly, however, the blade shot through to the hilt of the knife. Jim drew it back instantly. No light came through the crevice.

"I smell good air," he whispered, "but I can't see a thing. It must be night!"

They knew now what to do. The flagging must be removed at once, before any one should go by! The hole would be big enough to let them out! Old Man Anderson's heart leaped. It was over. They had won. Trust him to go where they'd never get him for the Slattery business! As for Detroit Jim, he already knew the next big trick that he would pull off—out in Cleveland!

Ultimately, as Detroit Jim worked upon it, the stone began to sag. An edge caught upon the adjacent flagging. The two men, perched upon the wobbly bricks, manipulated the stone, working it loose, until, finally, it came crashing down.

The stone had made noise enough, it seemed, to wake the dead; yet above them there was no sound. Swiftly they raised the flagging and set it securely upon the heap of bricks. When Detroit Jim stood upon this improvised platform his head was level with the aperture they had made. He could see no sky, no stars, could feel no wind, discover no light such as pervades even the darkest night.

"Good God!" he breathed. His fingers went out over the flagging. His knife dropped. The tinkle echoed dully down the conduit. He stooped to where Old Man Anderson stood, breathing hard.

"It's a—a room!" he whispered.

"A—a room?" repeated Old Man Anderson dully.

"Come! After me! Up! I'll pull you up!"

Detroit Jim, being wiry, swung himself up, and then bent down, groping for the old man's hands. Winded, panting

exhausted, the two men stood at last in this new blackness, clutching each other, their ears strained to catch the slightest sound.

"For God's sake, don't fall down that hole now!" hissed Detroit Jim. "Listen. We'll both crawl together till we get to a wall. Then you feel along one way, and whisper to me what you find, and I'll crawl the other. Look for a window or a door—some way out! We'll come together finally. Are you ready?"

"I'm—I'm afraid," whined the old man.

Detroit Jim's fingers dug into the other's arm, and he pulled the latter along. Their groping hands touched a wall—a wall of wood. Detroit Jim stood up and pulled Anderson beside him. He felt the old man shiver. He shoved him gently in to the left and himself moved cautiously to the right, slowly, catlike.

Finally, Jim came to a door. He could perceive no light through the chinks in the door. Sensing the increasing uncanniness of a room without windows, without furniture, with flagging for a floor, he turned the knob of the door gently, and it gave under his touch.

Just then there came to him a hoarse whisper from across the room. It made him jump. "I've—I've found some wires," the old man was saying, "in a cable running along the floor——"

"See where they lead!" Detroit Jim was breathless, in anticipation.

And then, shattering the overwhelming tension of the moment, shrilled, suddenly, a horrible, prolonged, piercing shriek ending in a gasp and the sound of a heavy body falling to the floor! What, in God's name, had happened to the old man? And that yell was enough to awaken the entire world!

Detroit Jim groped his way across the room. He could hear now no further sound from the old man. . . . Steps outside! He sank upon his knees, his hands outstretched. He heard a lock turn; then following upon a click the whole universe went white, and dazzling and scorching!

He raised one arm to his blinking, throbbing eyes. A rough voice shouted: "Hands up!"

There was a rush of feet, the rough clutch of hands at his shoulders. . . . Presently he found himself blinking

down upon the fear-contorted face of Old Man Anderson, dirt-streaked, bearded, gaunt, dead!

Slowly his eyes crawled beyond the body on the floor. . . . Before him, its empty arms stretched toward him, its straps and wires twisting snakily in front of him, was The Chair!

## “AURORE”

By ETHEL WATTS MUMFORD

From *Pictorial Review*

**Y**OUR name!—*Votre nom?*” Crossman added, for in the North Country not many of the habitants are bilingual.

She looked at him and smiled slowly, her teeth white against cardinal-flower lips.

“Ma name? Aurore,” she answered in a voice as mystically slow as her smile, while the mystery of her eyes changed and deepened.

Crossman watched her, fascinated. She was like no woman he had ever seen, radiating a personality individual and strange. “Aurore,” he repeated. “You’re not the dawn, you know; not a bit like it.” He did not expect her to own to any knowledge of the legend of her name, but she nodded her head understandingly.

“It was the Curé name’ me so,” she explained. “But the Curé and me,” she shrugged, “never could—how you say?—see—hear—one the other—so, I would not be a blonde just for spite to him—I am a very black dawn, *n’est-ce, pas?*”

“A black dawn,” he repeated. Her words unleashed his fancy—her heavy brows and lashes, her satiny raven hair, her slow voice that seemed made of silence, her eyes that changed in expression so rapidly that they dizzied one with a sense of space. “Black Dawn!” He stared at her long, which in no wise disconcerted her.

“Will you want, then, Antoine and me?” she asked at length.

He woke from his dream with a savage realization that, most surely, he wanted her. “Yes. Of course—you—and Antoine. Wait, *attendez*, don’t go yet.”

“*Why* not?” she smiled. “I have what I came for.”

Her hand was on the door-latch. The radiance from the opened door of the square, old-fashioned stove shimmered over her fur cap and intensified the broad scarlet stripes of her mackinaw. In black corduroy trousers, full and bagging as a moujik's, she stood at ease, her feet small and dainty even in the heavy caribou-hide boots.

"*Bon soir, monsieur,*" she said. "In two days we go with you to camp—me—and Antoine."

"Wait!" he cried, but she had opened the door. He rose with a start, and, ignoring the intense cold, followed her till the stinging breath of the North stabbed him with the recollection of its immutable power. All about him the night was radiant. Of a sudden the sky was hung with banners—banners that rippled and folded and unfolded, banners of rainbows, long, shaking loops of red and silver, ghosts of lost emeralds and sapphires, oriflammes that fluttered in the heavens, swaying across the world in mysterious majesty. Immensity, Silence, Mystery—The Northern Lights! "Aurora!" he called into the night, "Aurora—Borealis!"

The Curé of Portage Dernier drove up to the log-cabin office and shook himself from his blankets; his *soutane* was rolled up around his waist and secured with safety-pins; his solid legs were encased in the heaviest of woollen trousers and innumerable long stockings. His appearance was singularly divided—clerical above, under the long wool-lined cape, and "lay" below. Though the thermometer showed a shockingly depressed figure, the stillness and the warmth of the sun, busy at diamond-making in the snow, gave the feeling of spring.

The sky was inconceivably blue. The hard-frozen world was one immaculate glitter, the giant evergreens standing black against its brightness. The sonorous ring of axes on wood, the gnawing of saws, the crunching of runners, the crackling crash of distant trees falling to the woodsmen's onslaughts—Bijou Falls logging-camp was a vital centre of joyous activity.

The Curé grinned and rubbed his mittened hands. "*Hé—Hola!*" he called.

At his desk in the north window Crossman heard the hail, and went to the door. At sight of the singular padded figure



his face lifted in a grin. "Come in, Father," he exclaimed; "be welcome."

"Ah," said the Priest, his pink face shining with benevolence, "I thank you. Where is my friend, that good Jakapa? I am on my monthly circuit, and I thought to see what happens at the Falls of the Bijou." He stepped inside the cabin and advanced to the stove with outstretched hands. "I have not the pleasure," he said tentatively.

"My name is Crossman," the other answered. "I am new to the North."

"Ah, so? I am the Curé of Portage Dernier, but, as you see, I must wander after my lambs—very great goats are they, many of them, and the winter brings the logging. So I, too, take to the timber. My team," he waved an introducing hand at the two great cross-bred sled-dogs that unhooked from their traces had followed him in and now sat gravely on their haunches, staring at the fire. "You are an overseer for the company?" suggested the Curé, politely curious—"or perhaps you cruise?"

Crossman shook his head. "No, *mon père*. I came up here to get well."

"Ah," said the Curé, sympathetically tapping his lung. "In this air of the evergreens and the new wood, in the clean cold—it is the world's sanatorium—you will soon be yourself again."

Crossman smiled painfully. "Perhaps *here*"—he laid a long, slender finger on his broad chest—"but I heal not easily of the great world sickness—the War. It has left its mark! The War, the great malady of the world."

"You are right." Meditatively the Priest threw aside his cape and began unfastening the safety-pins that held up his cassock. "You say well. It strikes at the *heart*."

Crossman nodded.

"Yet it passes, my son, and Nature heals; as long as the hurt be in Nature, Nature will take care. And you have come where Nature and God work together. In this great living North Country, for sick bodies and sick souls, the good God has His good sun and His clean winds." He nodded reassurance, and Crossman's dark face cleared of its brooding.

"Sit down, Father." He advanced a chair.

"So," murmured the Curé, continuing his thought as he sank into the embrace of thong and withe. "So you were in the War, and did you take hurt there, my son?"

Crossman nodded. "Trench pneumonia, and then the rat at the lung; but of shock, something also. But I think it was not concussion, as the doctors said, but *soul-shock*. It has left me, Father, like Mohammed's coffin, suspended. I think I have lost my grip on the world—and not found my hold on another."

"Shock of the soul," the Priest ruminated. "Your soul is bruised, my son. We must take care of it." His voice trailed off. There was silence in the little office broken only by the yawn and snuffle of the sled-dogs.

Suddenly the door swung open. In the embrasure stood Aurore in her red mackinaw and corduroy trousers. A pair of snowshoes hung over her back, and her hand gripped a short-handled broad axe. Her great eyes turned from Crossman to the Curé, and across her crimson mouth crept her slow smile. The Curé sprang to his feet at sight of her, his face went white, and the lines from nose to lips seemed to draw in.

"Aurore!" he exclaimed; "Aurore!"

"*Oui, mon père,*" she drawled. "It is Aurore." She struck a provocative pose, her hand on her hip, her head thrown back, while her eyes changed colour as alexandrite in the sun.

The Curé turned on Crossman. "What is this woman to you?"

Her eyes defied him. "Tell him," she jeered. "What *am* I to you?"

"She is here with Antoine Marceau, the log-brander," Crossman answered unsteadily. "She takes care of our cabin, Jakapa's and mine."

"Is that *all*?" the Priest demanded.

Her eyes challenged him. What, indeed, was she to him? What *was* she? From the moment he had followed her into the boreal night, with its streaming lights of mystery and promise, she had held his imagination and his thoughts.

"Is that *all*?" the Priest insisted.

"You insult both this girl and me," Crossman retorted, stung to sudden anger.

“*Dieu merci !*” the Curé made the sign of the cross as he spoke. “As for this woman, send her away. She is *not* the wife of Antoine Marceau; she is not married—she *will* not be.”

In spite of himself a savage joy burned in Crossman’s veins. She was the wife of no man; she was a free being, whatever else she was.

“I do not have to marry,” she jeered. “That is for the women that only one man desires—or perhaps two—like some in your parish, *mon père*.”

“She is evil,” the Priest continued, paying no attention to her sneering comment. “I know not what she is, nor who. One night, in autumn, in the dark of the hour before morning, she was brought to me by some Indians. They had found her, a baby, wrapped in furs, in an empty canoe, rocking almost under the Grande Falls. But I tell you, and to my sorrow, I *know*, she is evil. She knows not God, nor God her. You, whose soul is sick, flee her as you would the devil! Aurore, the Dawn! I named her, because she came so near the morning. Aurore! Ah, God! She should be named after the blackest hour of a witch’s Sabbath!”

She laughed. It was the first time Crossman had heard her laugh—a deep, slow, far-away sound, more like an eerie echo.

“*He* has a better name for me,” she said, casting Crossman a look whose intimacy made his blood run hot within him. “‘The Black Dawn’—*n’est-ce-pas ?* Though I *have* heard him call me in the night—by another name,” with which equivocal statement she swung the axe into the curve of her arm, turned on her heel, and softly closed the door between them.

The Priest turned on him. “My son,” his eyes searched Crossman’s, “you have not lied to me?”

“No,” he answered steadily. “Once I called her the Aurora Borealis—that is all. To me she seems mysterious and changing, and coloured, like the Northern Lights.”

“She is mysterious and changing and beautiful, but it is not the lights of the North and of Heaven. She is the *feu follet*, the will-o’-the-wisp that hovers over what is rotten, and dead. Send her away, my son; send her away. Oh, she has left her trail of blood and hatred and malice in my parish,

I know. She has bred feuds; she has sent strong men to the devil, and broken the hearts of good women. But *you* will not believe me. It is to Jakapa I must talk. *Mon Dieu!* how is it that he let her come! You are a stranger, but he——”

“Jakapa wished for Antoine, and she was with him,” explained Crossman uneasily, yet resentful of the Priest’s vehemence.

“I can not wait.” The Curé rose and began repinning his clerical garments. “Where is Jakapa? Have you a pair of snowshoes to lend me? You must forgive my agitation, Monsieur, but you do not understand—I—which way?”

“He should be at Mile End, just above the Bijou. Sit still, Father; I will send for him. The wind sets right. I’ll call him in.” Slipping on his beaver jacket, he stepped outside and struck two blows on the great iron ring, a bent rail, that swung from its gibbet like a Chinese gong. A singing roar, like a metal bellow, sprang into the clear, unresisting air, leaped and echoed, kissed the crags of the Bijou and recoiled again, sending a shiver of sound and vibration through snow-laden trees, on, till the echoes sighed into silence. Crossman’s over-sensitive ear clung to the last burring whisper as it answered, going north, north, to the House of Silence, drawn there by the magnet of Silence, as water seeks the sea. For a moment he had almost forgotten the reason for the smitten clamour, hypnotized by the mystery of sound. Then he turned, to see Aurore, a distant figure of scarlet and black at the edge of the wood road, shuffling northward on her long snowshoes, northward, as if in pursuit of the sound that had gone before. She raised a mittened hand to him in ironic salutation. She seemed to beckon, north—north—into the Silence. Crossman shook himself. What was this miasma in his heart? He inhaled the vital air and felt the rush of his blood in answer, realizing the splendour of this beautiful, intensely living world of white and green, of sparkle and prismatic brilliance. Its elemental power like the urge of the world’s youth.

But Aurore? His brain still heard the echo of her laugh. He cursed savagely under his breath, and turned his back upon the Curé, unable to face the scrutiny of those kind, troubled eyes.

“Jakapa will be here presently,” he said over his shoulder. “That gong carries ten miles if there’s no wind. One ring, that’s for the Boss; two, call in for the whole gang; three, alarm—good as a telegraph or the telephone as far as it goes. Meanwhile, if you’ll excuse me, I’ll have a look at the larder.”

Without a doubt, he reasoned, Aurore would have left their mid-day meal ready. She would not return, he knew, until the guest had gone. In the little overheated cook-house he found the meal set out. All was in order. Then his eye caught a singular decoration fastened to the door, a paper silhouette, blackened with charcoal, the shape of a cassocked priest. The little cut-out paper doll figure was pinned to the wood by a short, sharp kitchen knife driven viciously deep, and the handle, quivering with the closing of the door, gave the illusion that the hand that had delivered the blow must have only at that instant been withdrawn.

Crossman shivered. He knew that world-old formula of hate; he knew of its almost innocent use in many a white caban, but its older, deeper meaning of demoniacal incantation rushed to his mind, somehow blending with the wizardry with which he surrounded his thoughts of the strange woman.

A step outside crunching in the snow. The door opened, revealing Antoine Marceau. The huge form of the log-brander towered above him. He could not read the expression of the eyes behind the square-cupped snow spectacles.

“She tell me, Aurore,” he rumbled, “that I am to come. We have the company.”

“Yes, the Curé of Portage Dernier.” Crossman watched him narrowly.

Antoine took off the protecting wooden blinders and thrust them in his pocket.

Crossman stood aside, hesitating. Antoine drew off his mittens with businesslike precision, and placed a huge, capable hand on a pot-lid, lifted it, and eyed the contents of the saucepan.

“The Curé, he like ptarmigan,” he observed, “but,” he added in a matter-of-fact voice, “the Curé like not Aurore—he have tell you, *hein*? Ah, well, why not? For him such as Aurore *are* not—*voilà*.”

"The Curé says she is a devil." Crossman marvelled at his temerity, yet he hung on the answer.

"Why not? For him, as I have say, she *is* not—for *me*, for *you*, ma frien', *that* is different." Antoine turned on him eyes as impersonal as those of Fate; where Crossman had expected to see animosity there was none, only a strange brotherhood of pitying understanding.

"For who shall forbid that the dawn she shall break—*hein?*" he continued. "The Curé? Not mooch. When the Dawn she come, she come; not with his hand can he hold her back. For me, now comes perhaps the sunset; perhaps the dawn for you. But what would you? Who can put the dog-harness on the wind, or put the bit in the teeth of the waterfall to hold him up?"

"Or who with his hand can draw the Borealis from heaven?" Crossman cut in. He spoke unconsciously. He had not wished to say that, he had not wanted to speak at all, but his subconscious mind had welded the thought of her so fast to the great mystery of the Northern Lights that without volition he had voiced it.

Antoine Marceau nodded quietly. The strangely aloof acknowledgment of Crossman's possible relation to this woman, *his* woman, who yet was not his or any man's, somehow shocked Crossman. His blood flamed at the thought, and yet he felt her intangible, unreal. He had but to look into her shifting, glittering eyes, and there were silence and playing lights. Suddenly his vision of her changed, became human and vital. He saw before him the sinuous movement of her strong young body. He realized the living perfume of her, clean and fresh, faintly aromatic as of pine in the sunlight, and violets in the shadow.

Antoine Marceau busied himself about the cook-house. He did not speak of Aurore again, not even when his eye rested on the paper doll skewered to the door by the deep-driven knife. He frowned, made the sign of the cross, jerked out the knife, and thrust its point in the purifying blaze of the charcoal fire. But he made no comment.

Crossman turned on his heel and entered the office-building. Through the south window he saw Jakapa snowshoeing swiftly up the short incline to the door; beside him walked the Curé, pleading and anxious. He could follow the words

as his lips framed them. In the present mood Crossman did not wish to hear the Curé's denunciation. It was sufficient to see that the Foreman had, evidently, no intention of acting on the advice proffered.

As he softly closed the door between the main office and the living room at the rear, he heard the men enter on a quick word of reproof in the Curé's rich bass.

“She does her work sufficiently well, and I shall not order her from the camp,” Jakapa snapped in reply. “She is with Marceau; if he keeps her in hand, what do I care? She leave him, that *his* affair, *mon Dieu, mon père.*”

“She has bewitched you, too, Jakapa. She has bewitched that other, the young man who is here for the healing of his soul. What an irony, to heal his soul, and she comes to poison it!”

“Heal his soul?” Jakapa laughed harshly. “He's had the weak lung, shell-shock, and he's a friend of the owner. *Mon père*, if he is here for the good of his soul, that is *your* province—but me?—I am here to boss one job, and I boss him, that's all. I hope only you have not driven the cook away, or the *pot-au-feu*, she will be thin.” He tried to speak the latter part of his sentence lightly, but his voice betrayed his irritation.

Crossman opened the door and entered. “Antoine will be here in a minute,” he announced. “Aurore sent him back to feed the animals.” He took down the enamelled tin dishes and cups and set their places. Jakapa eyed him covertly, with a half-sneering venom he had never before shown.

It was a silent meal. The Curé sighed and shook his head at intervals, and the Boss grumbled a few comments in answer to an occasional question concerning his lumberjacks. Crossman sat in a dream. Could he have understood aright when Antoine had spoken of the dawn?

Jakapa dropped a plate with a curse and a clatter. The sudden sound ripped the sick man's nerves like an exploding bomb. White to the lips, he jumped from his chair to meet the Boss's sneering eyes. The Curé laid a gentle hand on his arm, and he settled back shamefacedly.

“Your pardon, *mon père*—my nerves are on edge—excuse me—an inheritance of the trenches.”

"Emotion is bad for you, my son, and you should not emotion yourself," said the Priest gently.

"Do you travel far when you leave us now?" Crossman asked self-consciously, anxious to change the subject.

"To the camp at the Chaumière Noire, a matter of ten kilometres. It is no hardship, my rounds, not at all, with the ground like a white tablecloth, and this good sun, to me, like to my dogs, it is but play." He rose from the table, glad of the excuse to hasten his going, and with scant courtesy Jakapa sped his guest's departure.

As the sled disappeared among the trees, bearing the queerly bundled figure of the Priest, the Boss unhooked his snowshoes from the wall. He seemed to have forgotten Crossman's presence, but as he turned, his smouldering eyes lighted on him. He straightened with a jerk. "What did he mean when he say, *she* have bewitch *you*?" As always, when excited, his somewhat precise English slipped back into the idiom of the habitant. "By Gar! Boss or no Boss, I pack you out if I catch you. We make no jealousies for any one, not where I am. You come here for your health—*hein*? Well, better you keep this place healthy for you."

As if further to complicate the situation, the door opened to admit the woman herself. She closed it, leaned against the wall, looking from one to the other with mocking eyes.

"Well, do I leave? Am I to pack? Have you wash the hand of me to please the Curé, yes?"

Jakapa turned on her brutally. "Get to the cook-house! Wash your dish! Did I give orders to Antoine to leave hees work? By Gar! I feel like I take you and break you in two!" He moved his knotted hands with a gesture of destruction. There was something so sinister in the action that, involuntarily, Crossman cried out a startled warning. Her laugh tinkled across it.

"Bah!" she shrugged. "If you wish to kill, why do you not kill those who make the interferre? Are you a man? What is it, a cassock, that it so protect a man? But me, because I do not wear a woman's skirt, you will break me, hey? *Me*! Nevair mind, I prefer this man. He at least make no big talk." She slipped her arm through Crossman's, letting her fingers play down from his wrist to his finger-tips—and the thrill of it left him tongue-tied and helpless.



Jakapa cursed and crouched low. He seemed about to hurl himself upon the pair before him. Again she laughed, and her tingling, searching fingers stole slowly over his throbbing pulses.

She released Crossman's arm with a jerk, and snapped the fingers that had just caressed him in the face of the furious lumberman. "*Allons!* Must I forever have no better revenge but to knife one paper doll? Am I to be hounded like a beast, and threatened wherever I go? I am tired of this dead camp. I think I go me down the river." She paused a moment in her vehemence. Her next words came almost in a whisper: "*Unless you can cross the trail to Chaumière Noire—then, maybe, I stay with you—I say—maybe.*" With a single swooping movement of her strong young arm she swept the door open, and came face to face with Antoine Marceau. "What, thou?" she said airily.

He nodded. "Shall I go back, or do you want that I go to the other side?" he asked the Foreman.

"Go to the devil!" growled Jakapa, and slinging his snowshoes over his arm, he stamped out.

"*Tiens!*" said Antoine. "He is mad, the Boss."

"I think we are all mad," said Crossman.

"Maybe," said Antoine. Quietly he gathered together his axe, mittens, and cap, and shrugging his huge shoulders into his mackinaw, looked out at the glorious brightness of the stainless world and frowned. "Come, Aurore," he said quietly.

A little later, as Crossman rose to replenish the dwindling fire, he saw him, followed by Aurore, enter the northern end of the timber limit. Were they leaving, Crossman wondered. Had the silent woodsman asserted his power over the woman? Crossman took down the field-glasses from the nail on the wall. They were the sole reminder, here in the North Country, of his years of war service. He followed the two figures until the thickening timber hid them. Idly he swept the horizon of black-green trees, blue shadows, and sparkling snow. A speck moved—a mackinaw-clad figure passed swiftly across the clearing above the Little Bijou—only a glimpse—the man took to cover in the burned timber, where the head-high brush made a tangle of brown above which the gaunt, white, black-smeared arms of dead trees flung

agonized branches to the sky.—“The short-cut trail to Chaumière Noire”—“Shall I forever have no better revenge but to stab one paper doll?” Her words echoed in his ears.

*Jakapa was on the short cut to the Chaumière Noire!* Only Crossman's accidental use of the field-glasses had betrayed his going. For an instant Crossman's impulse was to rush out and ring the alarm on the shrieking steel gong, but the next instant he laughed at himself. Yes, surely, he was a sick man of many imaginings. The gang boss was gone about his business. The log-brander had called upon his woman to accompany him. That was all. Her angry words were mere threats—best forgotten.

With nervous haste he bundled into his heavy garments and ran from himself and his imaginings into the dazzling embrace of the sun.

He tramped to the gang at work above the Little Bijou Chute, where they raced the logs to the iron-hard ice of the river's surface far below. He even took a hand with the axe, was laughed at, and watched the precision and power of the Jacks as they clove, swung, and lopped. From the cliff he looked down at the long bunk-house, saw the blue smoke rising straight, curled at the top like the uncoiling frond of a new fern-leaf. Saw the Chinese cook, in his wadded coat of blue, disappear into the snow-covered mound that hid the provision shack, and watched the bounding pups refusing to be broken into harness by Siwash George. It was all very simple, very real, and the twists of his tired mind relaxed; his nervous hands came to rest in the warm depths of his mackinaw pockets. The peace of sunned spaces and flowing, clean air soothed his mind and heart.

The blue shadows lengthened. The gang knocked off work. The last log was rushed down the satin ice of the chute to leap over its fellows at the foot. The smell of bacon sifted through the odours of evergreen branches and new-cut wood. Crossman declined a cordial invitation to join the gang at chuck. He must be getting back, he explained, “for chow at the Boss's.”

Whistling, he entered the office, stirred up the fire, and crossed to the cook-house. It was empty. The charcoal fire was out. Shivering, he rebuilt it, looked through the larder, and hacked off a ragged slice of jerked venison. A

film of fear rose in his soul. What if they were *really* gone? What if Antoine *had* taken her? It looked like it. His heart sank. Not to see her again! Not to feel her strange, thrilling presence! Not to sense that indomitable, insolent soul, throwing its challenge before it as it walked through the world!

Crossman came out, returned to the office, busied himself in tidying the living room and solving the disorder of his desk. The twilight sifted over wood and hill, crept from under the forest arches, and spread across the snow of the open. He lit the lamps and waited. The silence was complete. It seemed as if the night had come and closed the world, locking it away out of the reach even of God.

The meal Crossman had bunglingly prepared lay untouched on the table. Now and then the crash of an avalanche of snow from the overburdened branches emphasized the stillness. Dreading he knew not what, Crossman waited—and loneliness is not good for a sick soul.

Thoughts began crowding, nudging one another; happenings that he had dismissed as casual took on new and sinister meanings. “Two and two together” became at once a huge sum, leaping to terrifying conclusions. Then with the silence and the tense nerve-draw of waiting came the sense of things finished—done forever. A vast, all-embracing finality—“*Néant*”—the habitant expression for the uttermost nothing, the word seemed to push at his lips. He wanted to say it, but a premonition warned him that to utter it was to make it real.

Should he call upon the name of the Void, the Void would answer. He feared it—it meant that She would be swallowed also in the great gaping hollow of nothingness. He strained his ears for sounds of the living world—the spit of the fire, the fall of clinkers in the grate, the whisper of the wind stirring at the door. He tried to analyse his growing uneasiness. He was sure now that she had followed Antoine’s bidding—forgetting him, if, indeed, her desires had ever reached toward him.

Now she seemed the only thing that mattered. He must find her; he must follow. Wherever she was, there only was the world of reality. Where she was, was life. And to find her, he must find Antoine—and then, without warning, the

door gaped—and Antoine stood before him, like a coloured figure pasted on the black ground of the night. Then he entered, quiet and matter-of-fact. He nodded, closed the door against the biting cold, pulled off his cap, and stood respectfully.

"It is no use to wait for the Boss; he will not come," said the log-brander. "I came to tell Monsieur, before I go on, that le Curé is safe at Chaumière Noire. Yes, he is safe, and Monsieur Jakapa have turn back, when I catch up with him, and tell him——"

"What?" gasped Crossman.

"It was to do," the giant twisted his cap slowly, "but it was harder than I think. It was not for jealousy, I beg you to know. That she would go if she want—to who she want, she can. I have no right to stop her. But she would have had the Curé knifed to death. She made the wish, and she put her wish in the heart of a man. If it had not been this time—then surely some other time. She always find a hand to do her will—even this of mine—once. I heard her tell to Jakapa. Therefore, Jakapa he has gone back to watch with her body. I told him where. Me I go. There are for me no more dawns. You love her, too, Monsieur, therefore, I come to tell you the end. *Bon soir, Monsieur.*"

He was gone. Again there was silence. Crossman sat rigid. What had happened? His mind refused to understand. Then he visioned her, lying on the white snow, scarlet under her breast, redder than her mackinaw, redder than her woollen mittens, redder than the cardinal-flower of her mouth—cardinal no more! "No, no!" he shrieked, springing to his feet. His words echoed in the empty room. "No—no!—He couldn't kill her!" He clung to the table. "No—no! No!" he screamed. Then he saw her eyes; she was looking in through the window—yes, they were her eyes—changing and glowing, eyes of mystery, of magic, eyes that made the silence, eyes that called and shifted and glowed. He laughed. Fools, fools! to think her dead! He staggered to the door and threw it wide. Hatless, coatless, he plunged headlong into the dark—the Dark? No! for she was there—on high, wide-flung, the banners of the Aurora Borealis blazed and swung, banners that rippled and ran, banners of rainbows, the souls of amethysts and emeralds, they fluttered

in the heavens, they swayed across the world, streamed like amber wine poured from an unseen chalice, dropped fold on fold, like the fluttering raiment of the gods.

In the north a great sapphire curtain trembled as if about to part and reveal the unknown Beyond; it grew brighter, dazzling, radiant.

“Aurore!” he called. “Aurore!” The grip of ice clutched his heart. Cold seized on him with unseen numbing hands. He was struggling, struggling with his body of lead—for one step—just a step nearer the great curtain, that now glowed warm—red—red as the ghost of her cardinal-flower lips—pillars of light, as of the halls of heaven. “Aurore!—Aurore!”

# MR. DOWNEY SITS DOWN

By L. H. ROBBINS

From *Everybody's*

JACOB DOWNEY waited in line at the meat shop. A footsore little man was he. All day long, six days a week for twenty-two years, he had stood on his feet, trotted on them, climbed on them, in the hardware department of Wilbram, Prescott & Co., and still they would not toughen; still they would hurt; still to sustain his spirit after three o'clock he had to invoke a vision of slippers, a warm radiator, the *Evening Bee*, and the sympathy of Mrs. Downey and the youngsters. To the picture this evening he had added pork chops.

The woman next in line ahead of him named her meat. Said the butcher, with a side glance at the clock, "A crown roast takes quite a while, lady. Could I send it in the morning?"

No, the lady wished to see it prepared. Expressly for that purpose had she come out in the rain. To-morrow she gave a luncheon.

"First come first served," thought Jacob Downey, and bode his time in patience, feeling less pity for his aching feet than for Butcher Myers. Where was the charity in asking a hurried man at five minutes to six o'clock to frill up a roast that would not see the inside of the oven before noon next day?

Now, crown roasts are one thing to him who waits on fallen arches, and telephone calls are another. Scarcely had Downey's opening come to speak for pork chops cut medium when off went the bell and off rushed Butcher Myers.

Sharply he warned the unknown that this was Myers's Meat Shop. Blandly he smiled into the transmitter upon learning that his caller was Mrs. A. Lincoln Wilbram.

By the audience in front of the counter the following social intelligence was presently inferred:

That Mr. and Mrs. Wilbram had just returned from Florida; that they had enjoyed themselves ever so much; that they hoped Mr. Myers's little girl was better; that they were taking their meals at the Clarendon pending the mobilization of their house-servants; that they expected to dine with the Mortimer Trevelyan's this evening; that food for the dog may with propriety be brought home from a hotel, but not from the Mortimer Trevelyan's; that there was utterly nothing in the icebox for poor Mudge's supper; that Mudge was a chow dog purchased by a friend of Mr. Wilbram's in Hongkong at so much a pound, just as Mr. Myers purchased live fowls; that Mudge now existed not to become chow, but to consume chow, and would feel grateful in his dog heart if Mr. Myers would, at this admittedly late hour, send him two pounds of bologna and a good bone; and that Mrs. Wilbram would consider herself under deep and lasting obligation to Mr. Myers for this act of kindness.

Mr. Myers assured Mrs. Wilbram that it would mean no trouble at all; he would send up the order as soon as his boy came back from delivering a beefsteak to the Mortimer Trevelyan's.

He filled out a slip and stuck it on the hook.

"Now, Mr. Downey," he said briskly.

But Jacob Downey gave him one tremendous look and limped out of the shop.

## II

IT WAS evening in the home of Miss Angelina Lance. Twenty-seven hours had passed since Jacob Downey's exasperated exit from Myers's Meat Shop. The eyes of Miss Angelina were bright behind her not-unbecoming spectacles as she watched the face of the solemn young man in the Morris chair near the reading lamp.

In his hand the solemn young man held three sheets of school composition paper. As he read the pencil writing on page one he lost his gravity. Over page two he smiled broadly. At the end of the last page he said:

"D. K. T. couldn't have done better. May I show it to him?"

In the office of the Ashland (N. J.) *Bee* the solemn young man was known as Mr. Sloan. At Miss Lance's he was Sam. The mentioned D. K. T. conducted the celebrated "Bee-Stings" column on the editorial page of Mr. Sloan's journal, his levity being offset by the sobriety of Mr. Sloan, who was assistant city-editor.

On two evenings a week Mr. Sloan fled the cares of the Fourth Estate and became Sam in the soul-refreshing presence of Miss Angelina. He was by no means her only male admirer. In the Sixth Grade at the Hilldale Public School she had thirty others; among these Willie Downey, whose name appeared on every page of the composition Mr. Sloan had read.

With a host of other sixth-graders throughout the city Willie had striven that day for a prize of ten dollars in gold offered by the public-spirited A. Lincoln Wilbram, of Wilbram, Prescott & Co., for the best schoolboy essay on Moral Principles.

"Moral principles, gentlemen; that is what we need in Ashland. How many men do you know who stand up for their convictions—or have any to stand up for?"

If the head of a department store is a bit thunderous at times, think what a Jovian position he occupies. In his cloud-girt, mahogany-panelled throne-room on the eighth floor he rules over a thousand mortals, down to the little Jacob Downeys in the basement, who, if they do not quite weep with delight when he gives them a smile, tremble, at least, at his frown. When a large body of popular opinion accords him greatness, were he not undemocratic to affect humility and speak small?

"I speak of common men," said Mr. Wilbram (this was at a Chamber of Commerce banquet); "of men whose living depends upon the pleasure of their superiors. How few there are with fearless eye!"

He scarcely heard the laughter from a group of building contractors at a side table, who had not seen a servile eye among their workmen in many moons; for a worthy project had popped into his mind at that instant. How was the moral backbone of our yeomanry to be stiffened save through



education? Why not a prize contest to stimulate the interest of the rising generation in this obsolete subject?

In many an Ashland home where bicycles, roller-skates, wireless outfits, and other such extravagances were strongly desired, the question had since been asked: "Pa, what are Moral Principles?" While some of the resulting essays indicated a haziness in paternal minds, not so the production that Mr. Sloan read in Miss Lance's parlour.

"But I couldn't let you print it," said Miss Angelina. "I wouldn't have Willie shamed for anything. He may be weak in grammar, but he is captain of every athletic team in the school. He has told me in confidence that he means to spend the prize money for a genuine horse-hide catching-mitt."

"If I cross out his name, or give him a *nom de plume*?"

On that condition Miss Lance consented.

### III

AT THE office next morning Sloan found the essay in his pocket and looked around the city-room for D. K. T. The staff poet-clown was no daylight saver; professing to burn the midnight oil in the interest of his employer, he seldom drifted in before half-past nine.

"See me. S. S." wrote Sloan, and dropped Willie's manuscript on D. K. T.'s desk.

Then he jumped and gasped, and copy-readers and office-boys jumped and gasped, and the religious editor dashed frantically for the stairs, outrunning the entire staff down the hall, though he had farther to go than any other man or woman there. A huge, heart-stopping shock had rocked the building, set the windows to clattering and the lights to swinging, and brought down in a cloud the accumulated dust of a quarter-century.

Within two minutes by the clock Sloan and five reporters had started for the scene of the Rutland disaster, fifteen miles away, where enough giant powder had gone up in one terrific blast to raze Gibraltar. A thriving town lay in ruins; hundreds of families were homeless; a steamship was sunk at her dock; a passenger train blown from the rails.

At eleven o'clock on the night following that pitiful day

Sloan journeyed homeward to Ashland in an inter-urban trolley-car in company with a crowd of refugees. A copy of the last edition of the *Bee* comforted his weary soul.

The first page was a triumph. Count on the office to back up its men in the field! There was the whole story, the whole horror and heartbreak, finely displayed. There were his photographs of the wreckage; there, in a "box" was his interview with the superintendent of the Rutland Company; there was a map of the devastated area. Perhaps someone had found time even to do an editorial; in that case the clean-up would be complete.

Opening the paper to the sixth page, he groaned; for the first thing that caught his eye was Willie Downey's essay, at the top of D. K. T.'s column, with Willie's name below the headline.

## MOREL PRINSAPLES

By WILLIE DOWNEY

AGE 12

Morel Prinsaples is when you have a nerve to stick up for some thing.

Like last night my Father went in Mires meet shop & stood in line 15 or twenty min. wateing his tirm & when his tirm come he says to mr. Mires Ile have 6 porc chops.

at that inst. the telapphone wrang & mr. Mires slidd for it like it was 2nd base.

Hold on Mires says Pa, who got here 1st, me or that bell wringer.

Igscuse me just 1 min. says Mr. mires.

No I be ding if Ile igscuse you says Pa, 1st come 1st served is the rool of bizness all over."

But Mr. mires wyped his hands on his apern & ansered the wring & it was mrs. Will Brum, she was going to eat out at a frends so she wanted 2 lbs, bolony & a dog bone.

So then Pa give him hale columbus.

"Here I bin wateing  $\frac{1}{2}$  an our he said, yet when some lazy lofer of a woman who has been reading a novvle or a sleep all after noon pphones you to rush her up some dog meet in youre Autto with gass 36 cts. & charge it to her acct. & may be you wont get youre munny for three 4 months, wy you run to wate on her while I stand & shovle my feet in youre saw dust like a ding mexican pea own or some thing.

What says Pa is there about a cusstamer who takes the trubble to come for his meet & pay cash for it & delivvers it him self that maiks him so Meen & Lo that he hass to be pushed one side for some body that has not got Gumpshun enoughf to order her dog bones before the rush our?

Do you think that people with a telapphone's munny is any better

than mine, do you think becuse I walk in here on my hine leggs that I am a piker & a cheep skait, because if so I will bring along my telapphone contract nex time & show you & then may be you will reckonnize me as a free born amerrican who dont haff to traid where I haff to play 2d fiddle to a chow pupp. Its agenst my morel prinsaples says Pa."

With theas wirds he walks out in the rane although his feet hurt him clear down to washington St. to the nex meet store, but by that time they were all cloased up so we had prinsaples for supper insted of porc chops.

Pa says if he run a store & had a pphone & no body to anser it & do nothing else he would ring it's neck, becuse while the telephone is the gratest blessing of the aige, but a pphone with out an opperater is like a ham ommalet with the ham let out. He says the reazon the Chane Stores have such a pull with the public is becuse the man behine the counter is not all the time Jilting you in the middle of your order & chacing off to be sweet to some sosciety dame with a dog 4 miles away.

Ma says she dont kno why we have a pphone any how becuse every time she is youseing it a woman but in & jiggles the hook & says will you pleas hang up so I can call a Dr. & when Ma hangs up & then lissens in to see who is sick, wy this woman calls up a lady frend & they nock Ma back & 4th over the wyre for ours & some times they say I bet she is lisening in on us dont you.

So as I say let us all stick up for our Morel Prinsaples like my Father come what may.

#### IV

BRIGHT were Miss Angelina's eyes but not with mirth. It was unspeakable, this thing that Mr. Sloan had done. Thrice before bedtime she called his lodgings. Mr. Sloan was not in.

Before the last call, she donned her wraps and went out to Plume Street. Courageously she pulled the bell at Number Nine. Willie's mother opened the door and cried, surprised, "Why! Miss Lance."

"Is Willie here? Have you seen the paper? Will you let me tell him how it happened, and how sorry I am?"

Willie was not receiving callers this evening. He had been sent to bed without supper. The explosion at Rutland had been as nothing, it seemed, to the outburst in the Downey home.

Slowly the extent of the harm dawned upon Miss Angelina. "It was Mrs. A. Lincoln Wilbram wanted the dog bone," said Mrs. Downey tearfully. "Everybody will recognize her; and what Mr. Wilbram will do to us we don't need to be told. Poor Jake is so upset he has gone out to roam in the dark. He couldn't stay in the house."

New jobs were scarce for men at his time of life, and with his feet. Dora and Jennie might have to leave high school.

"I'm sure you meant us no wrong, Miss Lance; I'm sure there was a mistake. But think how dreadful it is, after twenty-two years of having Mr. Wilbram's pay, then to turn around and backbite his wife like that, right out in print!"

Doubly troubled now, Miss Lance departed. Attracted by a quick gathering of loiterers in the avenue, she witnessed a controversy that might easily have become a police matter.

"You're a liar if you say you said all that to me!" shouted the burly Butcher Myers. "You never opened your head, you shrimp! Bawling me out in the papers and losing me my best customers! Whaddye mean?"

Back came the retort from Jacob Downey with the snarl of a little creature at bay.

"If I didn't say it to you then, you big lobster, I say it to you now. All that the paper says I said I say. What'll you do about it?"

"Hah! You!" Myers snapped his fingers in Downey's fiery face and turned away.

Miss Lance's path to the Hilldale School next morning took her past three post-boxes. Into the third she dropped a note that she had carried from home. Mr. Sloan would find her message exceedingly brief, although (or, perhaps, because) she had spent hours in composing it.

DEAR SIR:

I regret to discover that you lack moral principles.

ANGELINA LANCE.

Just before the last bell the janitor brought in a prisoner for her custody. Willie Downey's head was bloody but unbowed; three seventh-graders he had vanquished in one round. "They guyed me," said he. "They called me a Nawthour."

Morning prayer and song waited while teacher and pupil spoke earnestly of many things; while the teacher's eyes filled with tears, and the pupil's heart filled with high resolve to bring home the baseball championship of the Ashland Public

School League and lay it at Miss Angelina's feet, or perish in the attempt.

## V

THE A. Lincoln Wilbram prize went to a small boy named Aaron Levinsky whose English was 99 per cent. pure. Little Aaron's essay was printed as the centre-piece in Wilbram, Prescott & Co.'s page in the *Bee*; little Aaron invested his gold in thrift-stamps, and the tumult and the shouting died.

Miss Angelina Lance sat alone every evening of the week. True, Mr. Sloan had tried to right the wrong; he had called Miss Angelina on the telephone, which he should have known was an inadequate thing to do; he had also sent a ten-dollar bank-note to Willie, in care of Miss Lance at the Hildale School, together with his warm felicitations upon Willie's success as a *littérateur*. Did Willie know that his fine first effort had been reprinted, with proper credit, in the great New York *Planet*?

True, too, the illustrious D. K. T. had written Miss Angelina an abject apology, most witty and poetic, taking all the blame to himself and more than exonerating his high-principled friend Mr. Sloan.

But the bank-note went back to its donor without even a rejection slip; and D. K. T.'s humour was fatal to his client's cause. Ghastly are they who jest in the shadow of tragedy. Mr. Sloan and D. K. T. did not know, of course—Miss Angelina had not thought it of any use to tell them—of the sword which they had hung up by a thread above the heads of the Downeys.

As for Jacob Downey, he limped about amid his hardware in the basement at Wilbram, Prescott & Co.s, careworn, haunted of eye, expecting the house to crash about his ears at any moment. One does not with impunity publish the wife of one's employer as a lazy loafer.

The A. Lincoln Wilbrams had servants again, and dined at home. To Mr. Wilbram said Mrs. Wilbram one evening:

"It is the strangest thing. In the last month I've met scarcely a soul who hasn't asked me silly questions about Mudge and his diet. Mrs. Trevelyan and everybody. And they always look so queer."

Mr. Wilbram was reminded that while coming home that

evening with a package in his hand he had met Trevelyan, and Trevelyan had inquired: "What's that? A bone for the dog?"

"To-morrow," said A. Lincoln, "I'll ask him what he was driving at."

"What was the package?" queried his wife.

He fetched it from the hall. It had come to him at the store that day by registered mail.

"From Hildegarte," said Mrs. Wilbram, noting the Los Angeles postmark. Hildegarte was honeymooning among the orange groves. Wrote the happy bride:

DEAR AUNT AND UNCLE:

Charles and I see by the paper that Mudge is hungry, so we are sending him a little present.

"What can the child mean, Abe?"

"Don't ask me," he answered. "Undo the present and see."

They loosened blue ribbons and wrappings of soft paper, and disclosed a link of bologna sausage.

Maddening? It might have been, if Hildegarte had not thought to inclose a page from the *Daily Southern Californian*, upon which, ringed with pencil marks, was a bit of miscellany headed, "Morel Prinsaples."

They read it through to the conclusion:

So as I say let us all stick up for our Morel Prinsaples like my Father come what may.—Willie Downey in Ashland (N. J.) *Bee*.

"Why!—why!—it's—it's me!" cried Mrs. Wilbram. "I did telephone to Mr. Myers for two pounds of bologna and a dog bone—on the night we dined at the Trevelyans'!"

"It comes mighty close to libel," fumed Wilbram.

"How do they dare! You must see Worthington Oakes about this, Abe."

"I certainly will," he vowed.

## VI

HE CERTAINLY did, as Mr. Worthington Oakes, the publisher of the *Bee*, will testify. In the front office on the editorial floor he saw Mr. Oakes for a bad half-hour, and demanded a public retraction of the insult.

At about the same time a dapper stranger who had come up in the elevator with Mr. Wilbram held speech with Assistant City-Editor Sloan in the local room at the other end of the hall.

"Yonder's your bird," said Mr. Sloan, pointing to a poetic-looking young man at a desk in a corner.

Crossing to the poet, who was absorbed in his day's poesy and talking to himself as he versified, the stranger smiled and spoke.

"Am I addressing the celebrated D. K. T.?"

"Am, cam, dam, damn, ham, jam, lamb——"

The far-away look of genius faded out of the poet's eyes.

"Not buying," said he. "My pay-envelope is mortgaged to you book-agents for ten years to come. Ma'am, ram, Sam, cram, clam, gram, slam——"

"Books are not my line," said the dapper one briskly. "I represent the Jones-Nonpareil Newspaper Syndicate. In fact, I am Jones. I have a proposition to make to you, Mr. D. K. T., that may enable you to buy more books than you can ever read. You know, of course, what the Jones-Nonpareil service is. We reach the leading dailies of the United States and Canada——"

"Have a chair, Mr. Jones."

"Thank you. We handle some very successful writers. Malcomb Hardy, you may have heard, takes his little five hundred a week out of us; and poor Larry Bonner pulled down eleven hundred as long as he had health. His Chinese-laundryman sketches might be selling yet."

"Suspense is cruel," spoke D. K. T. eagerly. "Let the glad news come."

"Some time ago," said the syndicate man, "you printed in your column an essay in imitation of a schoolboy's. You called it 'Moral Principles'."

D. K. T. sank back with a low moan.

"If you can write six of those a week for a year," continued the visitor, "you won't ever need to slave any more. You can burn your pen and devote the rest of your life to golf and good works."

The poet closed his eyes. "Sham, swam, diagram," he murmured.

"Does a minimum guarantee of fifteen thousand a year

look like anything to you? There will, of course, be the book rights and the movie rights in addition."

"Anagram, epigram, telegram, flimflam—aha!" cried D. K. T. "Siam!" He wrote it down.

"That little skit of yours," pursued the caller, "has swept the country. You have created a nation-wide demand. My finger is on the journalistic pulse, and I know. Can you repeat?"

He drew a paper from his pocketbook.

"Here is a list of subjects your imaginary Willie Downey might start with: The Monetary System; the Cost of Living; the League of Nations; Capital and Labour——"

Over the stranger's head an office-boy whispered significantly: "Front office."

"Excuse me," said the poet, and hurried away.

With the publisher, in the front office, sat A. Lincoln Wilbram, quite purple in the cheeks. They had a file of the *Bee* before them.

"Diedrick," said Mr. Oakes, "on March eighteenth you printed this thing"—his finger on Willie's essay—"why did you do it?"

"What's the matter with it?" replied D. K. T.

"The matter with it," spoke Mr. Wilbram terribly, "is that it slanders my wife. It makes her out to eat dog bones. Friends of ours as far away as California have seen it and recognized her portrait, drawn by your scurrilous pen. The worst of it is, the slander is founded on fact. By what right do you air my domestic affairs before the public in this outrageous fashion?"

With agonized eyes the funny-man read the essay as far as the fateful line, "It was Mrs. Will Brum."

"My gosh!" he cried.

"How did you come to write such a thing?" Mr. Oakes demanded.

"Me write that thing? If I only had!"

The facts were recalled; the sending of Mr. Sloan and many reporters to Rutland; the need of extra hands at the copy-table that day.

"I found this contribution on my desk. It looked safe. In the rush of the morning I sent it up and never gave it another thought."



"So it is really a boy's essay, and not some of your own fooling?" asked Oakes.

"A boy's essay, yes; entered in Mr. Wilbram's prize contest, eliminated by the boy's teacher and shown by her to Mr. Sloan, who brought it to the shop. I know now that Sloan meant me to change the author's name to save the kid from ridicule. If there were actual persons in it, I'm as amazed as Mrs. Wilbram."

"I wonder, Oakes," said Wilbram, "that a dignified newspaper like yours would print such trash, in the first place."

Worthington Oakes looked down his nose. D. K. T. took up the challenge.

"Trash, sir? If it's trash, why has the Ashland Telephone asked permission to reprint it on the front cover of their next directory?"

"Have they asked that?"

"They have; they say they will put a little moral principle into the telephone hogs in this town. And didn't a Fifth Avenue minister preach a sermon on it last Sunday? Doesn't the *Literary Review* give it half a page this week? Hasn't it been scissored by almost every exchange editor in the land? Isn't there a man in the city-room now offering me fifteen thousand a year to write a daily screed like it?"

"You can see, Wilbram," said Mr. Oakes, "that there was no intention to injure or annoy. We are very sorry; but how can we print an apology to Mrs. Wilbram without making the matter worse?"

"Who is this Willie Downey?" demanded Wilbram. "And who is the school teacher?"

"I don't believe my moral principles will let me tell you," replied D. K. T. "I'm positive Mr. Sloan's won't let him. We received the essay in confidence."

"Enough said," Mr. Wilbram exclaimed, rising. "Good day to you. I don't need your help, anyway. I'll find out from the butcher."

## VII

IT SEEMED necessary that Mr. Sloan should call at the Lance home that evening. Whatever Miss Angelina might think of him, it was his duty to take counsel with her for the welfare of Willie.

He began with the least important of the grave matters upon his mind.

"Do you suppose your *protégé* could write some essays like the one we printed?"

"Why, Mr. Sloan?"

If Miss Angelina had responded, "Why, you hyena?" she would not have cut him more deeply than with her simple, "Why, Mr. Sloan?"

"A newspaper syndicate," he explained, "has offered D. K. T. a fortune for a series of them."

"Poor Willie!" she sighed. "He flunked his English exam. to-day. I'm afraid I shall have him another year."

"He is a lucky boy," said Sloan.

"Do you think so?"

Clearly her meaning was, "Do you think he is lucky when a powerful newspaper goes out of its way to crush him?"

"There is no use approaching him with a literary contract?"

"Not with the baseball season just opening. His team beat the Watersides yesterday, sixteen—nothing. He has more important business on hand than writing for newspapers."

Since Sloan wrote for a newspaper, this was rather a dig. Nevertheless, he persevered.

"A. Lincoln Wilbram is on his trail. Do you know that Willie libelled Mrs. Wilbram?"

"Oh! Sam. Surely I know about the libel. But is—is Mr. Wilbram really—— Has he discovered?"

"He came to the office to-day. We gave him no information; but he has other sources. He is bound to identify his enemy before he quits."

"I didn't know about the so-called slander at first," said she, "when I—when you——"

"When I promised to change Willie's name?"

"I found out when I went to them, on the night it came out in the paper. They were woefully frightened. They are frightened still. Mr. Downey has worked for Mr. Wilbram since he was a boy. They think of Mr. Wilbram almost as a god. It's—it's a tragedy, Sam, to them."

"Would it do any good to warn them?"

"They need no warning," said Miss Angelina. "Don't add to their terrors."

"I am more sorry than I can say. May I hope to be forgiven some day?"

"There's nothing to forgive, Sam. It was an accident. But don't you see what a dangerous weapon a newspaper is?"

"Worse than a car or a gun," he agreed.

As he strolled homeward along a stately avenue, wondering what he could do to avert the retribution that moved toward the Downeys, and finding that his assistant city-editor's resourcefulness availed him naught, he heard the scamper of feet behind him and whirled about with cane upraised in time to bring a snarling chow dog to a stand.

"Beat it, you brute!" he growled.

"Yeowp!" responded the chow dog, and leaped in air.

"Don't be alarmed," spoke a voice out of the gloom of the nearest lawn. "When he sees a man with a stick, he wants to play."

Sloan peered at the speaker's face. "Isn't this Mr. Wilbram? You were at the *Bee* office to-day, sir. May I have a word with you about the Willie Downey matter?"

"Come in," said Mr. Wilbram.

## VIII

ON THE first pay-day in May the impending sword cut its thread. Said a messenger to Jacob Downey: "They want you on the eighth floor." Downey set his jaws and followed.

In the mahogany-panelled room A. Lincoln Wilbram turned from the window and transfixed his servitor with eyes that bored like steel bits.

"Downey, I understand you have a literary son."

Jacob held his breath, eyed his accuser steadily, and assured himself that it would soon be over now.

"How about it, Downey?"

"I know what you mean, sir."

"Did you say the things printed there?"

The little man wasted no time in examining the newspaper clipping.

"Yes, sir, I did. If it has come to your lady's ears what I called her, I beg her pardon. But what I said I'll stick to. If I stand fifteen minutes in line in a meat store or any other

kind of store, I've got a right to be waited on ahead of anybody that rings up, I don't give a ding who she is."

"Good for you, Downey. Let me see, how long have you worked for us?"

"Twenty-three years next January, sir."

"Floor salesman all the while?"

"Since 1900. Before that I was a wrapper."

"How many men have been promoted over your head?"

"Three."

"Four," Wilbram corrected. "First was Miggins."

"I don't count him, sir. Him and I started together."

"Miggins was a failure. Then Farisell; now in prison. Next, McCardy; he ran off to Simonds & Co. the minute they crooked a finger at him. Last, young Prescott, who is now to come up here with his father. Could you run the department if you had it?"

"Between you and I," replied Jacob Downey, sick, dizzy, trembling, "I been running the department these fifteen years."

"How'd you like to run it from now as manager? When I find a man with 'convictions and courage I advance him. The man who stands up is the man to sit down. That's evolution. If you could stand up to a big butcher like Myers and talk Dutch to him the way you did, I guess we need you at a desk. What do you say?"

A desk! A chance to rest his feet! Jacob Downey stiffened.

"Mr. Wilbram, I—I got to tell the truth. I never said those things to Myers. I just walked out."

"But you said them. You acknowledge it."

"I said 'em, yes—after I got home. To the family I said 'em. When I was in the meat shop I only thought 'em."

"So Myers has told me," said Jove, smiling. "Downey, my man, you've got more than moral courage. You've got common sense to go with it. Tell young Prescott to give you his keys."

# THE MARRIAGE IN KAIRWAN

By WILBUR DANIEL STEELE

From *Harper's*

KAIRWAN the Holy lay asleep, pent in its thick walls. The moon had sunk at midnight, but the chill light seemed scarcely to have diminished; only the limewashed city had become a marble city, and all the towers turned fabulous in the fierce, dry, needle rain of the stars that burn over the desert of mid-Tunisia.

In the street Bab Djedid the nailed boots of the watch passed from west to east. When their thin racket had turned out and died in the dust of the market, Habib ben Habib emerged from the shadow of a door arch and, putting a foot on the tiled ledge of Bou-Kedj's fry shop, swung up by cranny and gutter till he stood on the plain of the house-tops.

Now he looked about him, for on this dim tableland he walked with his life in his hands. He looked to the west, toward the gate, to the south, to the northeast through the ghostly wood of minarets. Then, perceiving nothing that stirred, he went on moving without sound in the camel-skin slippers he had taken from his father's court.

In the uncertain light, but for those slippers and the long-tasselled *chechia* on his head, one would not have taken him for anything but a European and a stranger. And one would have been right, almost. In the city of his birth and rearing, and of the birth and rearing of his Arab fathers generations dead, Habib ben Habib bel-Kalfate looked upon himself in the rebellious, romantic light of a prisoner in exile—exile from the streets of Paris where, in his four years, he had tasted the strange delights of the Christian—exile from the university where he had dabbled with his keen, light-balasted mind in the learning of the conqueror.

Sometimes, in the month since he had come home, he had shaken himself and wondered aloud, "Where am I?" with the least little hint, perhaps, of melodrama. Sometimes in the French café outside the walls, among the officers of the garrison, a bantering perversity drove him on to chant the old glories of Islam, the poets of Andalusia, and the bombastic histories of the saints; and in the midst of it, his face pink with the Frenchmen's wine and his own bitter, half-frightened mockery, he would break off suddenly, "*Voilà, Messieurs!* you will see that I am the best of Mussulmans!" He would laugh then in a key so high and restless that the commandant, shaking his head, would murmur to the lieutenant beside him, "One day, Genet, we must be on the alert for a dagger in that quarter there, eh?"

And Genet, who knew almost as much of the character of the university Arab as the commandant himself, would nod his head.

When Habib had laughed for a moment he would grow silent. Presently he would go out into the ugly dark of the foreign quarter, followed very often by Raoul Genet. He had known Raoul most casually in Paris. Here in the Tunisian *bled*, when Raoul held out his hand to say good-night under the gate lamp at the Bab Djelladin, the troubled fellow clung to it. The smell of the African city, coming under the great brick arch, reached out and closed around him like a hand—a hand bigger than Raoul's.

"You are my brother: not they. I am not of these people, Raoul!"

But then he would go in, under the black arch and the black shade of the false-pepper trees. In the darkness he felt the trees, centuries old, and all the blank houses watching him.

To-night, stealing across the sleeping roofs, he felt the starlit mosque towers watching him in secret, the pale, silent espionage of them who could wait. The hush of the desert troubled him. Youth troubled him. His lips were dry.

He had come to an arbour covered with a vine. Whose it was, on what house-holder's roof it was reared, he had never known. He entered.

"She is not here." He moistened his lips with his tongue.

He sat down on the stone divan to wait, watching toward

the west through the doorway across which hung a loop of vine, like a snake.

He saw her a long way off, approaching by swift darts and intervals of immobility, when her whiteness grew a part of the whiteness of the terrace. It was so he had seen her moving on that first night when, half tipsy with wine and strangeness, he had pursued, caught her, and uncovered her face.

To-night she uncovered it herself. She put back the hooded fold of her *haik*, showing him her face, her scarlet mouth, her wide eyes, long at the outer corners, her hair aflame with henna.

The hush of a thousand empty miles lay over the city. For an hour nothing lived but the universe, the bright dust in the sky. . . .

That hush was disrupted. The single long crash of a human throat! Rolling down over the plain of the housetops!

"*La illah il Allah, Mohammed rassoul 'lah! Allah Akbar!* God is great!"

One by one the dim towers took it up. The call to prayer rolled between the stars and the town. It searched the white runways. It penetrated the vine-bowered arbour. Little by little, tower by tower, it died. In a *fondouk* outside the gate a waking camel lifted a gargling wail. A jackal dog barked in the Oued Zaroud two miles away. And again the silence of the desert came up over the city walls.

Under the vine Habib whispered: "No, I don't care anything about thy name. A name is such a little thing. I'll call thee 'Nedjma,' because we are under the stars."

"*Ai, Nedjmetek—'Thy Star'!*" The girl's lips moved drowsily. In the dark her eyes shone with a dull, steady lustre, unblinking, unquestioning, always unquestioning.

That slumberous acquiescence, taken from all her Arab mothers, began to touch his nerves with the old uneasiness. He took her shoulders between his hands and shook her roughly, crying in a whisper:

"Why dost thou do nothing but repeat my words? Talk! Say things to me! Thou art like the rest; thou wouldst try to make me seem like these Arab men, who wish for nothing in a woman but the shadow of themselves. And I am not like that!"

"No, *sidi*, no."

"But talk! Tell me things about thyself, thy life, thy world. Talk! In Paris, now, a man and a woman can talk together—yes—as if they were two friends met in a coffeehouse. And those women can talk! Ah! in Paris I have known women——"

The girl stirred now. Her eyes narrowed; the dark line of her lips thinned. At last something comprehensible had touched her mind.

"Thou hast known many women, then, *sidi*! Thou hast come here but to tell me that? Me, who am of little beauty in a man's eyes!"

Habib laughed under his breath. He shook her again. He kissed her and kissed her again on her red lips.

"Thou art jealous, then! But thou canst not comprehend. Canst thou comprehend this, that thou art more beautiful by many times than any other woman I have ever seen? Thou art a heaven of loveliness, and I cannot live without thee. That is true . . . Nedjma. I am going to take thee for my wife, because I cannot live without thine eyes, thy lips, the fragrance of thy hair. . . . Yes, I am going to marry thee, my star. It is written! It is written!"

For the first time he could not see her eyes. She had turned them away. Once again something had come in contact with the smooth, heavy substance of her mind. He pulled at her.

"Say! Say, Nedjma! . . . It is written!"

"It is not written, *sidi*." The same ungroping acquiescence was in her whisper. "I have been promised, *sidi*, to another than thee."

Habib's arms let go; her weight sank away in the dark under the vine. The silence of the dead night crept in and lay between them.

"And in the night of thy marriage, then, thy husband—or thy father, if thou hast a father—will kill thee."

"*In-cha-'llah*. If it be the will of God."

Again the silence came and lay heavy between them. A minute and another minute went away. Habib's wrists were shaking. His breast began to heave. With a sudden roughness he took her back, to devour her lips and eyes and hair with the violence of his kisses.



"No, no! I'll not have it! No! Thou art too beautiful for any other man than I even to look upon! No, no, no!"

Habib ben Habib walked out of the gate Djelladin. The day had come; the dawn made a crimson flame in the false-pepper trees. The life of the gate was already at full tide of sound and colour, braying, gargling, quarrelling—nomads wading in their flocks, Djlass countrymen, Singalese soldiers, Jewish pack-peddlers, Bedouin women bent double under their stacks of desert fire-grass streaming inward, dust white, dust yellow, and all red in the dawn under the red wall.

The flood ran against him. It tried to suck him back into the maw of the city. He fought against it with his shoulders and his knees. He tried now to run. It sucked him back. A wandering *Aïssaoua* plucked at his sleeve and held under his nose a desert viper that gave off metallic rose glints in its slow, pained constrictions.

"To the glory of Sidna Aïssa, master, two sous."

He kept tugging at Habib's sleeve, holding him back, sucking him back with his twisting reptile into the city of the faithful.

"In the name of Jesus, master, two copper sous!"

Habib's nerves snapped. He struck off the holy mendicant with his fist. "That the devil grill thee!" he chattered. He ran. He bumped into beasts. He bumped into a blue tunic. He halted, blinked, and passed a hand over his hot-lidded eyes. He stammered:

"My friend! I have been looking for you! *Hamdou lillah! El hamdou'llah!*"

Raoul Genet, studying the flushed, bright-eyed, unsteady youth, put up a hand to cover a little smile, half ironic, half pitying.

"So, Habib ben Habib, you revert! Camel-driver's talk in your mouth and camel's-hide slippers on your feet. Already you revert! Eh?"

"No, that is not the truth. But I am in need of a friend."

"You look like a ghost, Habib." The faint smile still twisted Raoul's lips. "Or a drunken angel. You have not slept."

"That's of no importance. I tell you I am in need——"

"You've not had coffee, Habib. When you've had coffee——"

"Coffee! My God! Raoul, that you go on talking of coffee when life and death are in the balance! For I can't live without—— Listen, now! Strictly! I have need to-night—to-morrow night—one night when it is dark—I have need of the garrison car."

The other made a blowing sound. "I'm the commandant, am I, overnight? *Zut!* The garrison car!"

Habib took hold of his arm and held it tight. "If not the car, two horses, then. And I call you my friend."

"*Two* horses! Ah! So! I begin to perceive. Youth! Youth!"

"Don't jibe, Raoul! I have need of two horses—two horses that are fast and strong."

"Are the horses in thy father's stable, then, of no swiftness and of no strength?"

It was said in the *patois*, the bastard Arabic of the Tunisian *bled*. A shadow had fallen across them; the voice came from above. From the height of his crimson saddle Si Habib bel-Kalfate awaited the answer of his son. His brown, unlined, black-bearded face, shadowed in the hood of his creamy burnoose, remained serene, benign, urbanely attendant. But if an Arab knows when to wait, he knows also when not to wait. And now it was as if nothing had been said before.

"Greeting, my son. I have been seeking thee. Thy couch was not slept upon last night."

Habib's face was sullen to stupidity. "Last night, sire, I slept at the *caserne*, at the invitation of my friend, Lieutenant Genet, whom you see beside me."

The Arab, turning in his saddle, appeared to notice the Christian for the first time. His lids drooped; his head inclined an inch.

"Greeting to thee, oh, master!"

"To thee, greeting!"

"Thou art in well-being?"

"There is no ill. And thou?"

"There is no ill. That the praise be to God, and the prayer!"

Bel-Kalfate cleared his throat and lifted the reins from the neck of his mare.

"Rest in well-being!" he pronounced.

Raoul shrugged his shoulders a little and murmured: "May God multiply thy days! . . . And yours, too," he added to Habib in French. He bowed and took his leave.

Bel-Kalfate watched him away through the thinning crowd, sitting his saddle stolidly, in an attitude of rumination. When the blue cap had vanished behind the blazing corner of the wool dyers, he threw the reins to his Sudanese stirrup boy and got down to the ground. He took his son's hand. So, palm in palm, at a grave pace, they walked back under the arch into the city. The market-going stream was nearly done. The tide, against which at its flood Habib had fought and won ground, carried him down again with its last shallow wash—so easily!

His nerves had gone slack. He walked in a heavy white dream. The city drew him deeper into its murmurous heart. The walls pressed closer and hid him away. The *souks* swallowed him under their shadowy arcades. The breath of the bazaar, feter of offal, stench of raw leather, and all the creeping perfumes of Barbary, attar of roses, chypre and amber and musk, clogged his senses like the drug of some abominable seduction. He was weary, weary, weary. And in a strange, troubling way he was at rest.

"*Mektoub!* It is written! It is written in the book of the destiny of man!"

With a kind of hypnotic fascination, out of the corners of his eyes, he took stock of the face beside him, the face of the strange being that was his father—the broad, moist, unmarked brow; the large eyes, heavy-lidded, serene; the full-fleshed cheeks from which the beard sprang soft and rank, and against which a hyacinth, pendent over the ear, showed with a startling purity of pallor; and the mobile, deep-coloured, humid lips—the lips of the voluptuary, the eyes of the dreamer, the brow of the man of never-troubled faith.

"Am I like that?" And then, "What can that one be to me?"

As if in answer, bel-Kalfate's gaze came to his son.

"I love thee," he said, and he kissed Habib's temple with his lips. "Thou art my son," he went on, "and my eyes were thirsty to drink of the sight of thee. It is *el jammaa*.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Friday, the Mohammedan Sabbath.

It is time we should go to the prayer. We shall go with Hadji Daoud to-day, for afterward, there at the mosque, I have rendezvous with his friends, in the matter of the dowry. It is the day, thou rememberest, that he appointed."

Habib wanted to stop. He wanted to think. He wanted time. But the serene, warm pressure of his father's hand carried him on.

Stammering words fell from his mouth.

"My mother—I remember—my mother, it is true, said something—but I did not altogether comprehend—and—Oh! my sire——"

"Thou shalt be content. Thou art a man now. The days of thy learning are accomplished. Thou hast suffered exile; now is thy reward prepared. And the daughter of the notary, thy betrothed, is as lovely as a palm tree in the morning and as mild as sweet milk, beauteous as a pearl, Habib, a milk-white pearl. See!"

Drawing from his burnoose a sack of Moroccan lambskin, he opened it and lifted out a pearl. His fingers, even at rest, seemed to caress it. They slid back among the treasure in the sack, the bargaining price for the first wife of the only son of a man blessed by God. And now they brought forth also a red stone, cut in the fashion of Tunis.

"A milk-white sea pearl, look thou; to wed in a jewel with the blood-red ruby that is the son of my breast. Ah, Habib, my Habib, but thou shalt be content!"

They stood in the sunlight before the green door of a mosque. As the hand of the city had reached out for Habib through the city gate, so now the prayer, throbbing like a tide across the pillared mystery of the court, reached out through the doorway in the blaze. . . . And he heard his own voice, strange in his mouth, shallow as a bleat:

"Why, then, sire—why, oh! why, then, hast thou allowed me to make of those others the friends of my spirit, the companions of my mind?"

"They are neither companions nor friends of thine, for God is God!"

"And why hast thou sent me to learn the teaching of the French?"

"When thou settest thy horse against an enemy it is well to have two lances to thy hand—thine own and his.

And it is written, Habib, son of Habib, that thou shalt be content. . . . Put off thy shoes now and come. It is time we were at prayer."

Summer died. Autumn grew. With the approach of winter an obscure nervousness spread over the land. In the dust of its eight months' drought, from one day to another, from one glass-dry night to another, the desert waited for the coming of the rains. The earth cracked. A cloud sailing lone and high from the coast of Sousse passed under the moon and everywhere men stirred in their sleep, woke, looked out—from their tents on the cactus steppes, from *fondouks* on the camel tracks of the west, from marble courts of Kairwan. . . . The cloud passed on and vanished in the sky. On the plain the earth cracks crept and ramified. Gaunt beasts tugged at their heel ropes and would not be still. The jackals came closer to the tents. The city slept again, but in its sleep it seemed to mutter and twitch. . . .

In the serpent-spotted light under the vine on the housetop Habib muttered, too, and twitched a little. It was as if the arid months had got in under his skin and peeled off the coverings of his nerves. The girl's eyes widened with a gradual, phlegmatic wonder of pain under the pinch of his blue fingers on her arms. His face was the colour of the moon.

"Am I a child of three years, that my father should lead me here or lead me there by the hand? Am I that?"

"Nay, *sidi*, nay."

"Am I a sheep between two wells, that the herder's stick should tell me, 'Here, and not there, thou shalt drink'? Am I a sheep?"

"Thou art neither child nor sheep, *sidi*, but a lion!"

"Yes, a lion!" A sudden thin exaltation shook him like a fever chill. "I am more than a lion, Nedjma, I am a man—just as the *Roumi*<sup>1</sup> are men—men who decide—men who undertake—agitate—accomplish . . . and now, for the last time, I have decided. A fate has given thy loveliness to me, and no man shall take it away from me to enjoy. I will take it away from them instead! From all the men of this Africa, conquered by the French. Hark! I will come and

<sup>1</sup>Romans—i. e., Christians.

take thee away in the night, to the land beyond the sea, where thou mayest be always near me, and neither God nor man say yes or no!"

"And there, *sidi*, beyond the sea, I may talk unveiled with other men? As thou hast told me, in France——"

"Yes, yes, as I have told thee, there thou mayest—thou——"

He broke off, lost in thought, staring down at the dim oval of her face. Again he twitched a little. Again his fingers tightened on her arms. He twisted her around with a kind of violence of confrontation.

"But wouldst thou rather talk with other men than with me? Dost thou no longer love me, then?"

"*Ai*, master, I love thee. I wish to see no other man than thee."

"Ah, my star, I know!" He drew her close and covered her face with his kisses.

And in her ear he whispered: "And when I come for thee in the night, thou wilt go with me? Say!"

"I will go, *sidi*. *In-cha-'llah*! If God will!"

At that he shook her again, even more roughly than before.

"Don't say that! Not, 'If God will!' Say to me, 'If thou wilt!'"

"*Ai—Ai——*"

There was a silence.

"But let it be quickly," he heard her whispering, after a while. Under his hand he felt a slow shiver moving over her arms. "*Nekaf!*" she breathed, so low that he could hardly hear. "I am afraid."

It was another night when the air was electric and men stirred in their sleep. Lieutenant Genet turned over in bed and stared at the moonlight streaming in through the window from the court of the *caserne*. In the moonlight stood Habib.

"What do you want?" Genet demanded, gruff with sleep.

"I came to you because you are my friend."

The other rubbed his eyes and peered through the window to mark the Sudanese sentry standing awake beside his box at the gate.

"How did you get in?"

"I got in as I shall get out, not only from here, but from Kairwan, from Africa—because I am a man of decision."

"You are also, Habib, a skeleton. The moon shows through you. What have you been doing these weeks, these months, that you should be so shivery and so thin? Is it Old Africa gnawing at your bones? Or are you, perhaps, in love?"

"I am in love. Yes. . . . *Ai, ai, Raoul habiby*, if but thou couldst see her—the lotus bloom opening at dawn—the palm tree in a land of streams——"

"Talk French!" Genet got his legs over the side of the bed and sat up. He passed a hand through his hair. "You are in love, then . . . and again I tell you, for perhaps the twentieth time, Habib, that between a man and a woman in Islam there is no such thing as love."

"But I am not in Islam. I am not in anything! And if you could but see her——"

"Lust!"

"What do you mean by 'lust'?"

"Lust is the thing you find where you don't find trust. Lust is a priceless perfume that a man has in a crystal vial, and he is the miser of its fragrance. He closes the windows when he takes the stopper out of that bottle to drink its breath, and he puts the stopper back quickly again, so that it will not evaporate—not too soon."

"But that, Raoul, is love! All men know that for love. The priceless perfume in a crystal beyond price."

"Yes, love, too, is the perfume in the vial. But the man who has that vial opens the windows and throws the stopper away, and all the air is sweet forever. The perfume evaporates, forever. And this, Habib, is the miracle. The vial is never any emptier than when it began."

"Yes, yes—I know—perhaps—but to-night I have no time——"

The moon *did* shine through him. He was but a rag blown in the dark wind. He had been torn to pieces too long.

"I have no time!" he repeated, with a feverish force. "Listen, Raoul, my dear friend. To-day the price was paid in the presence of the *cadi*, Ben Iskhar. Three days from now they lead me to marriage with the daughter of the notary.

What, to me, is the daughter of the notary? They lead me like a sheep to kill at a tomb. . . . Raoul, for the sake of our friendship, give me hold of your hand. To-morrow night—the car! Or, if you say you haven't the disposal of the car, bring me horses.” And again the shaking of his nerves got the better of him; again he tumbled back into the country tongue. “For the sake of God, bring me two horses! By Sidna Aïssa! by the Three Hairs from the Head of the Prophet I swear it! My first-born shall be named for thee, Raoul. Only bring thou horses! Raoul! Raoul!”

It was the whine of the beggar of Barbary. Genet lay back, his hands behind his head, staring into shadows under the ceiling.

“Better the car. I'll manage it with some lies. To-morrow night at moonset I'll have the car outside the gate Dje-did.” After a moment he added, under his breath, “But I know your kind too well, Habib ben Habib, and I know that you will not be there.”

Habib was not there. From moonset till half-past three, well over two hours, Genet waited, sitting on the stone in the shadow of the gate, prowling the little square inside. He smoked twenty cigarettes. He yawned three times twenty times. At last he went out got into the car and drove away.

As the throb of the engine grew faint a figure in European clothes and a long-tasselled *chechia* crept out from the dark of a door arch along the street. It advanced toward the gate. It started back at a sound. It rallied again, a figure bedeviled by vacillation. It came as far as the well in the centre of the little square.

On the horizon toward the coast of Sousse rested a low black wall of cloud. Lightning came out of it from time to time and ran up the sky, soundless, glimmering. . . . The cry of the morning muezzin rolled down over the town. The lightning showed the figure sprawled face down on the cool stone of the coping of the well. . . .

The court of the house of bel-Kalfate swam in the glow of candles. A striped awning shut out the night sky, heavy with clouds, and the women, crowding for stolen peeps on



the flat roof. A confusion of voices, raillery, laughter, eddied around the arcaded walls, and thin music bound it together with a monotonous count of notes.

Through the doorway from the marble *entresol* where he stood Habib could see his father, cross-legged on a dais, with the notary. They sat hand in hand like big children, conversing gravely. With them was the *caïd* of Kairwan, the *cadî*, ben Iskhar, and a dark-skinned cousin from the oases of the Djerid in the south. Their garments shone; there was perfume in their beards. On a rostrum beyond and above the crowded heads the musicians swayed at their work—*tabouka* players with strong, nervous thumbs; an oily, gross lutist; an organist, watching everything with the lizard eyes of the hashish taker. Among them, behind a taborette piled with bait of food and drink, the Jewish dancing woman from Algiers lolled in her cushions, a drift of white disdain. . . .

He saw it all through a kind of mist. It was as if time had halted, and he was still at the steaming *hammam* of the afternoon, his spirit and his flesh undone, and all about him in the perfumed vapour of the bath the white bodies of his boyhood comrades glimmering luminous and opalescent.

His flesh was still asleep, and so was his soul. The hand of his father city had come closer about him, and for a moment it seemed that he was too weary, or too lazy, to push it away. For a little while he drifted with the warm and perfumed cloud of the hours.

Hands turned him around. It was Houseen Abdelkader, the *caïd's* son, the comrade of long ago—Houseen in silk of wine and silver, hyacinths pendent on his cheeks, a light of festival in his eyes.

"*Es-salam alekoum, ya Habib habiby!*" It was the salutation in the plural—to Habib, and to the angels that walk, one at either shoulder of every son of God. And as he spoke he threw a new white burnoose over Habib's head, so that it hung down straight and covered him like a bridal veil.

"*Alekoum selam, ya Seenou!*" It was the name of boyhood, Seenou, the diminutive, that fell from Habib's lips. And he could not call it back.

"Come thou now." He felt the gentle push of Houseen's hands. He found himself moving toward the door that stood

open into the street. The light of an outer conflagration was in his eyes. The thin music of lute and tabouka in the court behind him grew thinner; the boom of drums and voices in the street grew big. He had crossed the threshold. A hundred candles, carried in horizontal banks on laths by little boys, came around him on three sides, like footlights. And beyond the glare, in the flaming mist, he saw the street Dar-el-Bey massed with men. All their faces were toward him, hot yellow spots in which the black spots of their mouths gaped and vanished.

"That the marriage of Habib be blessed! Blessed be the marriage of Habib!"

The riot of sound began to take form. It began to emerge in a measure, a *boom-boom-boom* of tambours and big goatskin drums. A bamboo fife struck into a high, quavering note. The singing club of Sidibou-Saïd joined voice.

The footlights were moving forward toward the street of the market. Habib moved with them a few slow paces without effort or will. Again they had all stopped. It could not be more than two hundred yards to the house of the notary and his waiting bride, but by the ancient tradition of Kairwan an hour must be consumed on the way.

An hour! An eternity! Panic came over Habib. He turned his hooded eyes for some path of escape. To the right, Houseen! To the left, close at his shoulder, Mohammed Sherif—Mohammed the laughing and the well-beloved—Mohammed, with whom in the long, white days he used to chase lizards by the pool of the Aglabides . . . in the long, white, happy days, while beyond the veil of palms the swaying camel palanquins of women, like huge bright blooms, went northward up the Tunis road. . . .

What made him think of that?

"*Boom-boom-boom-boom!*" And around the drums beyond the candles he heard them singing:

*On the day of the going away of my Love,  
When the litters, carrying the women of the tribe,  
Traversed the valley of Dad, like a sea, mirage,  
They were like ships, great ships, the work of the children of  
Adoul,  
\* like the boats of Yamen's sons. . . .*

"*Boom-boom!*" The monotonous pulse, the slow minor slide of sixteenth tones, the stark rests—he felt the hypnotic pulse of the old music tampering with the pulse of his blood. It gave him a queer creeping fright. He shut his eyes, as if that would keep it out. And in the glow of his lids he saw the tents on the naked desert; he saw the forms of veiled women; he saw the horses of warriors coming like a breaker over the sand—the horses of the warriors of God!

He pulled the burnoose over his lids to make them dark. And even in the dark he could see. He saw two eyes gazing at his, untroubled, untroubling, out of the desert night. And they were the eyes of any woman—the eyes of his bride, of his sister, his mother, the eyes of his mothers a thousand years dead.

"Master!" they said.

They were pushing him forward by the elbows, Mohammed and Houseen. He opened his eyes. The crowd swam before him through the yellow glow. Something had made an odd breach in his soul, and through the breach came memories.

Memories! There at his left was the smoky shelf of blind Moulay's café—black-faced, white-eyed old Moulay. Moulay was dead now many years, but the men still sat in the same attitudes, holding the same cups, smoking the same *chibouk* with the same gulping of bubbles as in the happy days. And there between the café and the *souk* gate was the same whitewashed niche where three lads used to sit with their feet tucked under their little *kashabias*, their *chechias* awry on their shaven polls, and their lips pursed to spit after the leather legs of the infidel conquerors passing by. The *Roumi*, the French blasphemers, the defilers of the mosque! Spit on the dogs! Spit!

Behind his reverie the drums boomed, the voices chanted. The lament of drums and voices beat at the back of his brain—while he remembered the three lads sitting in the niche, waiting from one white day to another for the coming of Moulay Saa, the Messiah; watching for the Holy War to begin.

"And I shall ride in the front rank of the horsemen, please God!"

"And I, I shall ride at Moulay Saa's right hand, please

God, and I shall cut the necks of *Roumi* with my sword, like barley straw!"

Habib advanced in the spotlight of the candles. Under the burnoose his face, half shadowed, looked green and white, as if he were sick to his death. Or, perhaps, as if he were being born again.

The minutes passed, and they were hours. The music went on, interminable.

"*Boom-boom-boom-boom*——" But now Habib himself was the instrument, and now the old song of his race played its will on him.

Pinkness began to creep over the green-white cheeks. The cadence of the chanting had changed. It grew ardent, melting, voluptuous.

. . . *And conquests I have made among the fair ones, perfume inundated,  
Beauties ravishing; that sway in an air of musk and saffron,  
Bearing still on their white necks the traces of kisses.* . . .

It hung under the pepper trees, drunk with the beauty of flesh, fainting with passion. Above the trees mute lightning played in the cloud. Habib ben Habib was born again. Again, after exile, he came back into the heritage. He saw the heaven of the men of his race. He saw Paradise in a walking dream. He saw women forever young and forever lovely in a land of streams, women forever changing, forever virgin, forever new; strangers intimate and tender. The angels of a creed of love—or of lust!

"Lust is the thing you find where you don't find trust."

A thin echo of the Frenchman's diatribe flickered through his memory, and he smiled. He smiled because his eyes were open now. He seemed to see this Christian fellow sitting on his bed, bare-footed, rumple-haired, talking dogmatically of perfumes and vials and stoppers thrown away, talking of faith in women. And that was the jest. For he seemed to see the women, over there in Paris, that the brothers of that naïve fellow trusted—trusted alone with a handsome young university student from Tunisia. Ha-ha-ha! Now he remembered. He wanted to laugh out loud at a race of men that could be as simple as that. He wanted to

laugh at the bursting of the iridescent bubble of faith in the virtue of beautiful women. The Arab knew!

A colour of health was on his face; his step had grown confident. Of a sudden, and very quietly, all the mixed past was blotted out. He heard only the chanting voices and the beating drums.

*Once I came into the tent of a young beauty on a day of rain. . . .  
Beauty blinding. . . . Charms that ravished and made  
drunkards of the eyes. . . .*

His blood ran with the song, pulse and pulse. The mute lightning came down through the trees and bathed his soul. And, shivering a little, he let his thoughts go for the first time to the strange and virgin creature that awaited his coming there, somewhere, behind some blind house wall, so near.

"Thou hast suffered exile. Now is thy reward prepared."

What a fool! What a fool he had been!

He wanted to run now. The lassitude of months was gone from his limbs. He wanted to fling aside that clogging crowd, run, leap, arrive. How long was this hour? Where was he? He tried to see the housetops to know, but the glow was in his eyes. He felt the hands of his comrades on his arms.

But now there was another sound in the air. His ears, strained to the alert, caught it above the drums and voices—a thin, high ululation. It came from behind high walls and hung among the leaves of the trees, a phantom yodeling, the welcoming "you-you-you-you" of the women of Islam.

Before him he saw that the crowd had vanished. Even the candles went away. There was a door, and the door was open.

He entered, and no one followed. He penetrated alone into an empty house of silence, and all around him the emptiness moved and the silence rustled.

He traversed a court and came into a chamber where there was a light. He saw a negress, a Sudanese duenna, crouching in a corner and staring at him with white eyes. He turned toward the other side of the room.

She sat on a high divan, like a throne, her hands palms together, her legs crossed. In the completeness of her immobility she might have been a doll or a corpse. After the

strict fashion of brides, her eyebrows were painted in thick black arches, her lips drawn in scarlet, her cheeks splashed with rose. Her face was a mask, and jewels in a crust hid the flame of her hair. Under the stiff kohl of their lids her eyes turned neither to the left nor to the right. She seemed not to breathe. It is a dishonour for a maid to look or to breathe in the moment when her naked face suffers for the first time the gaze of the lord whom she has never seen.

A minute passed away.

"This is the thing that is mine!" A blinding exultation ran through his brain and flesh. "Better this than the 'trust' of fools and infidels! No question here of 'faith.' *Here I know!* I know that this thing that is mine has not been bandied about by the eyes of all the men in the world. I know that this perfume has never been breathed by the passers in the street. I know that it has been treasured from the beginning in a secret place—against this moment—for me. This bud has come to its opening in a hidden garden; no man has ever looked upon it; no man will ever look upon it. None but I."

He roused himself. He moved nearer, consumed with the craving and exquisite curiosity of the new. He stood before the dais and gazed into the unwavering eyes. As he gazed, as his sight forgot the grotesque doll painting of the face around those eyes, something queer began to come over him. A confusion. Something bothering. A kind of fright.

"Thou!" he breathed.

Her icy stillness endured. Not once did her dilated pupils waver from the straight line. Not once did her bosom lift with breath.

"*Thou!* It is *thou*, then, O runner on the housetops by night!"

The fright of his soul grew deeper, and suddenly it went out. And in its place there came a black calm. The eyes before him remained transfixed in the space beyond his shoulder. But by and by the painted lips stirred once.

"*Nekaf!* . . . I am afraid!"

Habib turned away and went out of the house.

In the house of bel-Kalfate the Jewess danced, still, even in voluptuous motion, a white drift of disdain. The music

edded under the rayed awning. Raillery and laughter were magnified. More than a little *bokha*, the forbidden liquor distilled of figs, had been consumed in secret. Eyes gleamed; lips hung. . . . Alone in the thronged court on the dais, the host and the notary, the *caid*, the *cadi*, and the cousin from the south continued to converse in measured tones, holding their coffee cups in their palms.

"It comes to me, on thought," pronounced bel-Kalfate, inclining his head toward the notary with an air of courtly deprecation—"it comes to me that thou hast been defrauded. For what is a trifle of ten thousand *douros* of silver as against the rarest jewel (I am certain, *sidi*) that has ever crowned the sex which thou mayest perhaps forgive me for mentioning?"

And in the same tone, with the same gesture, Hadji Daoud replied: "Nay, master and friend, by the Beard of the Prophet, but I should repay thee the half. For that is a treasure for a sultan's daughter, and this *fillette* of mine (forgive me) is of no great beauty or worth——"

"In saying that, Sidi Hadji, thou sayest a thing which is at odds with half the truth."

They were startled at the voice of Habib coming from behind their backs.

"For thy daughter, Sidi Hadji, thy Zina, is surely as lovely as the full moon sinking in the west in the hour before the dawn."

The words were fair. But bel-Kalfate was looking at his son's face.

"Where are thy comrades?" he asked, in a low voice. "How hast thou come?" Then, with a hint of haste: "The dance is admirable. It would be well that we should remain quiet, Habib, my son."

But the notary continued to face the young man. He set his cup down and clasped his hands about his knee. The knuckles were a little white.

"May I beg thee, Habib ben Habib, that thou shouldst speak the thing which is in thy mind?"

"There is only this, *sidi*, a little thing: When thou hast another bird to vend in the market of hearts, it would perhaps be well to examine with care the cage in which thou hast kept that bird.

"Thy daughter," he added, after a moment of silence—"thy daughter, Sidi Hadji, is with child."

That was all that was said. Hadji Daoud lifted his cup and drained it, sucking politely at the dregs. The *cadi* coughed. The *cadi* raised his eyes to the awning and appeared to listen. Then he observed, "To-night, *in-cha'llah*, it will rain." The notary pulled his burnoose over his shoulders, groped down with his toes for his slippers, and got to his feet.

"Rest in well-being!" he said. Then, without haste, he went out.

Habib followed him tardily as far as the outer door. In the darkness of the empty street he saw the loom of the man's figure moving off toward his own house, still without any haste.

"And in the night of thy marriage thy husband, or thy father, if thou hast a father——"

Habib did not finish with the memory. He turned and walked a few steps along the street. He could still hear the music and the clank of the Jewess's silver in his father's court.

"*In-cha'llah!*" she had said, that night.

And after all, it *had* been the will of God. . . .

A miracle had happened. All the dry pain had gone out of the air. Just now the months of waiting for the winter rains were done. All about him the big, cool drops were spattering on the invisible stones. The rain bathed his face. His soul was washed with the waters of the merciful God of Arab men.

For, after all, from the beginning, it had been written. All written!

"*Mektoub!*"



# GRIT

By TRISTRAM TUPPER

From *Metropolitan Magazine*

**G**RIT was dead. There was no mistake about that. And on the very day of his burial temptation came to his widow.

Grit's widow was "Great" Taylor, whose inadequate first name was Nell—a young, immaculate creature whose body was splendid even if her vision and spirit were small. She never had understood Grit.

Returning from the long, wearisome ride, she climbed the circular iron staircase—up through parallels of garlic-scented tenement gloom—to her three-room flat, neat as a pin; but not even then did she give way to tears. Tears! No man could make Great Taylor weep!

However, drawing the pins from her straw hat, dyed black for the occasion, she admitted, "It ain't right." Grit had left her nothing, absolutely nothing, but an unpleasant memory of himself—his grimy face and hands, his crooked nose and baggy breeches. . . . And Great Taylor was willing that every thought of him should leave her forever. "Grit's gone," she told herself. "I ain't going to think of him any more."

Determinedly Great Taylor put some things to soak and, closing down the top of the stationary washtubs, went to the window. The view was not intriguing, and yet she hung there: roofs and more roofs, a countless number reached out toward infinity, with pebbles and pieces of broken glass glittering in the sunlight; chimneys sharply outlined by shadow; and on every roof, except one, clothes-lines, from which white cotton and linen flapped in the wind at the side of faded overalls and red woollen shirts. They formed a kind of flag—these red, white, and blue garments flying in

the breeze high above a nation of toilers. But Great Taylor's only thought was, "It's Monday."

One roof, unlike the rest, displayed no such flag—a somewhat notorious "garden" and dance hall just around the corner.

And adjacent to this house was a vacant lot on which Great Taylor could see a junk-cart waiting, and perhaps wondering what had become of its master.

She turned her eyes away. "I ain't going to think of him." Steadying her chin in the palms of her hands, elbows on the window-sill, Nell peered down upon a triangular segment of chaotic street. Massed humanity overflowed the sidewalks and seemed to bend beneath the weight of sunlight upon their heads and shoulders. A truck ploughed a furrow through push-carts that rolled back to the curb like a wave crested with crude yellow, red, green, and orange merchandise. She caught the hum of voices, many tongues mingling, while the odours of vegetables and fruit and human beings came faintly to her nostrils. She was looking down upon one of the busiest streets of the city that people sometimes call the Devil's Own.

Grit had wrested an existence from the débris of this city. Others have waded ankle-deep in the crowd; but he, a grimy, infinitesimal molecule, had been at the bottom wholly submerged, where the light of idealism is not supposed to penetrate. Grit had been a junkman; his business address—a vacant lot; his only asset—a junk-cart across the top of which he had strung a belt of jingling, jangling bells that had called through the cavernous streets more plainly than Grit himself: "Rags, old iron, bottles, and ra-ags."

This had been Grit's song; perhaps the only one he had known, for he had shoved that blest cart of his since a boy of thirteen; he had worn himself as threadbare as the clothes on his back, and at last the threads had snapped. He had died of old age—in his thirties. And his junk-cart, with its bells, stood, silent and unmanned, upon the vacant lot just around the corner.

Great Taylor had seen Grit pass along this narrow segment of street, visible from her window; but his flight had always been swift—pushing steadily with head bent, never looking

up. And so it was not during his hours of toil that she had known him. . . .

Nell closed the window. She was not going to think of him any more. "Ain't worth a thought." But everything in the room reminded her of the man. He had furnished it from his junk-pile. The drawer was missing from the centre table, the door of the kitchen stove was wired at the hinges; even the black marble clock, with its headless gilt figure, and the brown tin boxes marked "Coffee," "Bread," and "Sugar"—all were junk. And these were the things that Grit, not without a show of pride, had brought home to her!

Nell sank into a large armchair (with one rung gone) and glowered at an earthen jug on the shelf. Grit had loved molasses. Every night he had spilt amber drops of it on the table, and his plate had always been hard to wash. "Won't have that to do any more," sighed Nell. Back of the molasses jug, just visible, were the tattered pages of a coverless book. This had come to Grit together with fifty pounds of waste paper in gunny-sacks; and though Nell had never undergone the mental torture of informing herself as to its contents, she had dubbed the book "Grit's Bible," for he had pawed over it, spelling out the words, every night for years. It was one thing from which she could not wash Grit's grimy fingermarks, and so she disliked it even more than the sticky molasses jug. "Him and his book and his brown molasses jug!" One was gone forever, and soon she would get rid of the other two.

And yet, even as she thought this, her eyes moved slowly to the door, and she could not help visualizing Grit as he had appeared every evening at dusk. His baggy breeches had seemed always to precede him into the room. The rest of him would follow—his thin shoulders, from which there hung a greenish coat, frayed at the sleeves; above this, his long, collarless neck, his pointed chin and broken nose, that leaned toward the hollow and smudges of his cheek.

He would lock the door quickly and stand there, looking at Nell.

"Why did he always lock the door?" mused Great Taylor. "Nothing here to steal! Why'd he stand there like that?" Every night she had expected him to say something, but he never did. Instead, he would take a long breath, almost

like a sigh, and, after closing his eyes for a moment, he would move into the room and light the screeching gas-jet. "Never thought of turning down the gas." This, particularly, was a sore point with Great Taylor. "Never thought of anything. Just dropped into the best chair."

"It's a good chair, Nell," he would say, "only one rung missing." And he would remain silent, drooping there, wrists crossed in his lap, palms turned upward, fingers curled, until supper had been placed before him on the table. "Fingers bent like claws," muttered Great Taylor, "and doing nothing while I set the table."

Sometimes he would eat enormously, which irritated Nell; sometimes he would eat nothing except bread and molasses, which irritated Nell even more. "A good molasses jug," he would say; "got it for a dime. Once I set a price I'm a stone wall; never give in." This was his one boast, his stock phrase. After using it he would look up at his wife for a word of approval; and as the word of approval was never forthcoming, he would repeat: "Nell, I'm a stone wall; never give in."

After supper he would ask what she had been doing all day. A weary, almost voiceless, man, he had told her nothing. But Great Taylor while washing the dishes would rattle off everything that had happened since that morning. She seldom omitted any important detail, for she knew by experience that Grit would sit there, silent, wrists crossed and palms turned up, waiting. He had always seemed to know when she had left anything out, and she always ended by telling him. Then he would take a long breath, eyes closed, and, after fumbling back of the molasses jug, would soon be seated again beneath the streaming gas-jet spelling to himself the words of his coverless book.

So vivid was the picture, the personality and routine of Grit, that Great Taylor felt the awe with which he, at times, had inspired her. She had been afraid of Grit—afraid to do anything she could not tell him about; afraid not to tell him about everything she had done. But now she determined: "I'll do what I please." And the first thing it pleased Great Taylor to do was to get rid of the odious molasses jug.

She plucked it from the shelf, holding the sticky handle between two fingers, and dropped it into the peach crate that

served as a waste-basket. The noise when the jug struck the bottom of the crate startled her. Great Taylor stood there—listening. Someone was slowly ascending the circular staircase. The woman could hear a footfall on the iron steps.

"Grit's gone," she reassured herself. "I'll do what I please."

She reached for the grimy book, "Grit's Bible," the most offensive article in the room, and with sudden determination tore the book in two, and was about to throw the defaced volume into the basket along with the earthen jug when fear arrested the motion of her hands. Her lips parted. She was afraid to turn her head. The door back of her had opened.

Great Taylor was only ordinarily superstitious. She had buried Grit that morning. It was still broad daylight—early afternoon. And yet when she turned, clutching the torn book, she fully expected to see a pair of baggy breeches preceding a collarless, long-necked man with a broken nose, and smudges in the hollows of his cheeks.

Instead, she wheeled to see a pair of fastidiously pressed blue serge trousers, an immaculate white collar, a straight nose and ruddy complexion. In fact, the man seemed the exact opposite of Grit. Nell glanced at the open door, back at the man, exhaled tremulously with relief, and breathed: "Why didn't you knock?"

"Sorry if I startled you," puffed the man, entirely winded by the six flights. "Must have pushed the wrong button in the vestibule. No great harm done."

"Who are you? What you want?"

"Junk. That's one of the things I came to see| about—the junk in back of my place. I suppose it's for sale." He thrust his white hands into the side pockets of his coat, pulling the coat snugly around his waist and hips, and smiled amiably at Great Taylor's patent surprise.

"You! . . . Buy Grit's junk business!" What did *he* want with junk? He was clean! From head to foot he was clean! His hair was parted. It was not only parted, it was brushed into a wave, with ends pointing stiffly up over his temples (a coiffure affected by bartenders of that day); and Nell even detected the pleasant fragrance of pomade. "You ain't a junkman."

The man laughed. "I don't know about that."

He studied her a moment in silence. Nell was leaning back against the washtubs, her sleeves rolled up, her head tilted quizzically, lips parted, while tints of colour ebbed and flowed in her throat and cheeks. She had attained the ripeness of womanhood and very nearly animal perfection. The man's attitude might have told her this. One of his eyes, beneath a permanently cocked eyebrow, blinked like the shutter of a camera and seemed to take intimate photographs of all parts of her person. The other eye looked at her steadily from under a drooping lid. "No," he said, after the pause of a moment, "I'm not going into the junk business." But he wanted to get the rubbish away from the back of his place. "I'll buy it and have it carted away. It's too near the 'Garden.'" He rocked up on his toes and clicked his heels gently. "I own the house just around the corner."

"I knew it," Nell murmured fatuously. The man was vaguely familiar, even though she could not remember having seen him before.

"Set your price." He turned away, and Nell imagined that his camera-like eye was taking instantaneous photographs of all the broken and mended things in the immaculate room. A wave of hot blood made her back prickle and dyed her throat crimson.

"I don't like rubbish," said the man. "I don't like junk."

"Who does?" stammered Great Taylor.

"You dislike junk, and yet there was your husband, a junkman." He watched her narrowly from beneath his drooping eyelid.

Great Taylor was not of the noblesse, nor did she know the meaning of noblesse oblige; and had she been a man, perhaps she would have denied her former lord and master—once, twice, or even thrice—it has been done; but being a woman, she said: "Leave Grit out of it."

This seemed to please the man from around the corner. "I think we are going to get on," he said significantly. "But you must remember that Grit can't take care of you any longer."

"Grit's gone," assented Nell; "gone for good."

"Uhm." The man allowed his singular eyes to move over

her. "I think we can arrange something. I've seen you pass my place, looking in; and I had something in mind when I started up here—something aside from junk. I could make a place over there—matron or cashier. How would you like that—cashier at the Garden?" He rocked up on his toes and clicked his heels quite audibly.

"I don't know anything about it."

"You'll soon learn," he was confident. He mentioned the salary, and that a former cashier was now half owner of an uptown place. And for half an hour Great Taylor's saturnine mind followed in the wake of his smoothly flowing words.

Why couldn't Grit have talked like that? she kept asking herself. Grit never said anything. Why couldn't he been clean like that, with hair brushed into a curl that sat up like that? . . . The man's words gradually slipped far beyond her, and only his pleasant voice accompanied her own thoughts. No reason why she shouldn't be cashier at the Garden. Only one reason, anyway, and that wasn't any reason at all. . . .

On an afternoon more than a year ago she had gone to the place around the corner. She had told Grit all about it, and Grit had said in his weary voice, "Don't never go again, Nell." She had argued with Grit. The Garden wasn't wicked; nothing the matter with it; other people went there of an afternoon; she liked the music. . . . And Grit had listened, drooping in his chair, wrists crossed and palms turned upward. Finally, when Nell had finished, he had repeated, "Don't go again." He had not argued, for Grit never argued; he was always too weary. But this had been one of his longest speeches. He had ended: "The Devil himself owns that place. I ought to know, my junkyard's right back of it." And he had closed his eyes and taken a long, deep breath. "When I say a thing, Nell, I'm a stone wall. You can't go there again—now or never." And that had settled it, for Great Taylor had been afraid of Grit. But now Grit was dead; gone for good. She would do as she pleased. . . .

When she looked up the man had stopped talking. He glanced at the clock.

"What time?" murmured Great Taylor.

"Five," said the man from just around the corner.

Nell nodded her head and watched as the man's fastidiously pressed trousers and polished shoes cleared the closing door.

Nell immediately went to the looking-glass—a cracked little mirror that hung by the mantelpiece—and studied the reflection of herself with newly awakened interest. She had never seemed so radiant—her smooth hair, her lineless face, her large gray eyes and perfect throat. "I ain't so bad looking," she admitted. Grit had never made her feel this way. And again she asked herself why he could not have been clean like the man from around the corner. She rehearsed all that had been said. She thought of the salary the man had mentioned, and made calculations. It was more than Grit had averaged for the two of them to live on. With prodigal fancy she spent the money and with new-born thrift she placed it in bank. Limited only by her small knowledge of such things, she revelled in a dream of affluence and luxury which was only dissipated when gradually she became conscious that throughout the past hour she had been clinging to a grimy, coverless book.

Damp finger-prints were upon the outer leaves, and the pages adhered to her moistened hand. She loosened her grip, and the book opened to a particularly soiled page on which a line had been underscored with a thick red mark. Dully, Great Taylor read the line, spelling out the words; but it conveyed nothing to her intellect. It was the fighting phrase of a famous soldier: "*I have drawn the sword and thrown away the scabbard.*"

"What does that mean?" she mumbled. Her eyes wandered to the top of the page, where in larger type was the title: "Life of 'STONEWALL' JACKSON." "Stonewall," repeated Nell. "Stone wall!" The word had the potency to bring vividly before her Grit's drooping, grimy form. Her ears rang with his ridiculous boast. His voice seemed no longer low and weary. "When I say a thing . . . stone wall. Can't go there again—now or never." Great Taylor mumbled disparagingly, "He got it from a book!" And again she read the fighting phrase of Grit's hero: "*I have drawn the sword and thrown away the scabbard.*" "Can't mean Grit," she mused. "He never threw away anything. . . ." And she tossed his desecrated Bible toward the



peach crate; but missing its aim, the book slid along the floor with a slight rustle, almost like a sigh, and struck the chair-board behind the washtubs, where it lay limp and forgotten.

Back of Nell the clock struck the half hour, and she turned quickly, her heart thumping with the fear of being late. But the hour was only three thirty. "Plenty time." She gazed at the broken clock. "A good clock," Grit used to say; "keeps time and only cost a quarter." "Stone wall! . . . Humph! . . ."

Nell transformed the washtubs into a bath by the removal of the centre partition, and within an hour was bathed and dressed. Sticking the pins through her straw hat, dyed black, she took from the bottom drawer of the cupboard a patent-leather hand-bag with colourful worsted fruit embroidered upon its shining sides. She thought of the night Grit had brought it home to her, his pride—he had bought it at a store. But a glance around the room obliterated this memory, and she mumbled, "Wish I warn't never, *never* going to see this place again! Wait till I get money. . . ." She glared at the broken furniture, each piece of which brought back some memory of the man. She could see him drooping in the armchair, with his wrists crossed, fingers curled. She glared at the shelf and imagined him fumbling for something that was not there. She started for the door, then, turning back, reached into the peach crate. "There! Keep your old molasses jug!" she said, in a dry voice, and, replacing the jug on the shelf, she went out into the hall.

Winding down through the tenement-house gloom, Great Taylor was not without fear. Her footfall on the uncarpeted landings and iron treads sounded hollow and strangely loud. The odours that in the past had greeted her familiarly, making known absorbing domestic details of her neighbours, caused her neither to pause nor to sniff. She reached the narrow entrance hall, dark and deserted, and, hurrying down its length, fumbled with the knob and pulled open the street door. Dazzling sunlight, a blast of warm air and the confused clatter of the sidewalk engulfed her. She stood vacillating in the doorway, thinly panoplied for the struggle of existence. Her body was splendid, it is true, but her spirit was small. Despite the sunlight and warmth she

was trembling. And yet, for years she had gone down into this street confident of herself, mingling on equal terms with its wayfarers, her ear catching and translating the sounds that, converging, caused this babel. Now, suddenly, all of it was meaningless, the peddlers with whom she had bickered and bargained in a loud voice with gestures, breast to breast, were strangers and the street an alien land. Many things seemed to have passed backward out of her life. She was no longer Grit's wife, no longer the Great Taylor of yesterday. She was something new-born, free of will; all the old ties had been clipped. She could do as she pleased. No one could stop her. And she pleased to become a denizen of a world which, though just around the corner, was unrelated to the sphere in which she had moved.

"What's the matter with me?" she asked herself. "Nothing to be afraid of. He's gone. I'll do as I please." With such assertions she bolstered her courage, but nevertheless she was trembling.

Glossy-haired women jostled her with their baskets. Taller by a head, Nell pushed her way oblivious of the crowd. At the corner she paused. "I ain't going to be early." A clock across the avenue, visible beneath the reverberating ironwork of the elevated, seemed to have stopped at the half hour. It was four thirty. She watched the long hand until it moved jerkily. A policeman, half dragging a shrieking woman and followed by a jostling, silent crowd, swept Great Taylor aside and put in a call for the wagon.

She hurriedly rounded the corner and passed a window that displayed a pyramid of varnished kegs backed by a mirror with a ram's head painted on it in colours. Beyond was the side entrance. Over the door hung a glass sign, one word in large red letters: "DANCING." She caught the odour of cheap wine and stale beer. Again she said, "I ain't going to be early," and moved away aimlessly.

Beyond the end of this building was a vacant lot and Great Taylor moved more swiftly with head averted. She had passed nearly to the next building before she stopped and wheeled around defiantly. "I ain't afraid to look," she said to herself and gazed across at Grit's junk-cart, with its string of bells, partly concealed back against the fence. It was standing in the shadow, silent, unmanned. She walked

on for a few steps and turned again. The cart was standing as before, silent, unmanned. She stood there, hands on her hips, trying to visualize Grit drooping over the handle—his collarless neck, his grimy face and baggy breeches; but her imagination would not paint the picture. "Grit's gone for good," she said. "Why couldn't he been clean like other people, like the man that owns the Garden? No excuse for being dirty and always tired like that. Anybody could push it and keep clean, too—half clean, anyway." She slipped a glance at the clock. It stood at twenty minutes before the hour of her appointment. "A baby could push it. . . ."

She picked her way across the vacant lot to the junk-cart and laid her hand upon the grimy handle. The thing moved. The strings of bells set up a familiar jingle. "Easy as a baby carriage!" And Great Taylor laughed. The cart reached the sidewalk, bumped down over the curb and pulling Great Taylor with it went beyond the centre of the street. She tried to turn back but a clanging trolley car cut in between her and the curb, a wheel of the junk-cart caught in the smooth steel track and skidded as if it were alive with a stupid will of its own. "It ain't so easy," she admitted. With a wrench she extracted the wheel, narrowly avoided an elevated post and crashed head on into a push-cart, laden with green bananas resting on straw. An Italian swore in two languages and separated the locked wheels.

Hurriedly Great Taylor shoved away from the fruit man and became pocketed in the traffic. Two heavy-hoofed horses straining against wet leather collars crowded her toward the curb and shortly the traffic became blocked. She looked for a means of escape and had succeeded in getting one wheel over the curb when a man touched her on the arm. "Someone is calling from the window up there," he said in a low weary voice like Grit's. Nell swung around, gasping, but the man had moved away down the sidewalk and a woman was calling to her from a second-story window.

"How much?" called the woman, waving a tin object that glinted in the sunlight. Great Taylor stared stupidly. "Clothes boiler," yelled the woman. "Fifty cents. . . . Just needs soldering." "What?" stammered Nell. "Fifty cents," shouted the woman in the window. And something prompted Great Taylor to reply, "Give you a dime."

"Quarter," insisted the woman. "Dime . . . Ten cents," repeated Great Taylor, somewhat red in the face. "Once I set a price I'm a . . ." But the woman's head had disappeared and her whole angular person soon slid out through the doorway. Entirely befogged, Great Taylor fumbled in her patent-leather bag with its worsted fruit, discovered two nickels, and placed the leaky boiler beside the rusty scales on the junk-cart.

"Ain't I got enough junk without that?" she grumbled. But the traffic of the Devil's Own city was moving again and Great Taylor was moving with it. She passed a corner where a clock in a drug store told her the time—ten minutes of the hour. "I got to get back," she told herself, and heading her cart determinedly for an opening succeeded in crossing to the opposite side of the congested avenue. There, a child, attracted by the jingling of the bells, ran out of a house with a bundle of rags tied in a torn blue apron. The child placed the bundle on the scales and watched with solemn wide eyes. Great Taylor again fumbled in the bag and extracted a coin which transformed the little girl into an India-rubber thing that bounced up and down on one foot at the side of the junk-cart. "Grit never gave me only a penny a pound," she cried.

"Grit is dead," said Great Taylor.

"Dead!" echoed the child, clinging motionless to the wheel. "Grit is dead?" She turned suddenly and ran toward the house, calling: "Mamma, poor old Grit is dead."

Great Taylor put her weight against the handle of the cart. She pushed on desperately. Something had taken hold of her throat. "What's the matter with me?" she choked. "Didn't I know he was dead before this? Didn't I know it all along? I ain't going to cry over no man . . . not in the street, anyway." She hurriedly shoved her cart around a corner into a less-congested thoroughfare and there a mammoth gilded clock at the edge of the sidewalk confronted her. The long hand moved with a sardonic jerk and indicated the hour—the hour of her appointment. But Great Taylor turned her eyes away. "Pushing a junk-cart ain't so easy," she said, and for a moment she stood there huddled over the handle; then, taking a long, deep breath, like Grit used to do, she straight-

ened herself and sang out, clear and loud, above the noises of the cavernous street: "Rags . . . old iron . . . bottles and ra-ags."

The city that people call the Devil's Own lost its sharp outline and melted into neutral tints, gray and blue and lavender, that blended like an old, old tapestry. It was dusk. Great Taylor strode slowly with laborious long strides, her breast rising and falling, her body lengthening against the load, her hands gripping the handle of the cart, freighted with rusty, twisted, and broken things. At crossings she paused until the murmuring river of human beings divided to let her pass. Night settled upon the high roofs and dropped its shadow into the streets and alleys, and the windows began to glow. Light leaped out and streaked the sidewalks while at each corner it ran silently down from high globes like full moons and spattered over the curb into the gutter and out as far as the glistening car tracks. She passed blocks solid with human beings and blocks without a human soul. Cataracts of sound crashed down into the street now and again from passing elevated trains, and the noise, soon dissipated, left trembling silence like pools of sinister black water. She passed through stagnant odours and little eddies of perfume. She lifted her drooping head and saw a door open—the darkness was cut by a rectangle of soft yellow light, two figures were silhouetted, then the door closed. A gasolene torch flared above a fruit stand hard against the towering black windowless wall of a warehouse and a woman squatted in the shadow turning a handle. Nell pushed on past a cross street that glittered and flared from sidewalk to cornice, and at the next corner a single flickering gas-jet revealed a dingy vestibule with rows of tarnished speaking tubes. . . .

The air became thick with noise and odours and the sidewalks swayed with people. Great Taylor slowly rounded a familiar corner, slackened the momentum of the junk-cart, and brought up squarely against the curb. Dragging the wheels, she gained the sidewalk and, beyond, the rims of the cart cut into soft earth. She crossed the vacant lot. A city's supercilious moon alone gave its half-light to the junkyard of Grit and here the woman unloaded the cart, carrying heavy unyielding things against her breast. She did not

linger. She was trembling from fatigue and from emotions even more novel to her. She closed the gate without looking back at the weird crêpe-like shadows that draped themselves among the moonlit piles of twisted things. Nearing the corner, she glanced with dull eyes at a glaring red sign: "Dancing." Voices, laughter, and music after a kind came from the doorway. A man was singing. Great Taylor recognized the voice but did not pause. She was not to see the man from just around the corner again for many years.

Hurrying, without knowing why she hurried, Nell climbed the circular iron staircase up through parallels of odorous gloom and, entering her flat, closed the door and quickly locked it against the world outside—the toil, the bickering, the sneers, the insults and curses flung from alley gates and down upon her in the traffic of the Devil's Own city. She closed her eyes and took a long deep breath almost like a sigh. She was home. It was good to be home, but she lacked the words and was far too weary to express her emotions.

Lighting the gas she sank into a chair. What did it matter if the gas was screeching? She drooped there, hands in her lap, wrists crossed, palms turned upward and fingers curled stiffly like claws—from holding to the jarring handle of the junk-cart.

Presently she raised her eyes and glanced across at the shelf with its row of tin boxes marked "Bread," "Coffee," "Sugar." On the next shelf was Grit's molasses jug. She arose and fumbled behind this, but nothing was there—Grit's Bible was gone. Then she remembered, and striking a match placed her cheek to the floor and found the grimy book beneath the stationary washtubs. "Stone wall," she murmured, "Grit was a stone wall." At the mantelpiece she caught a glimpse of herself in the cracked little mirror, but she was too weary to care what she looked like, too weary to notice that her hair was matted, that grime and smudges made hollows in her cheeks, and that even her nose seemed crooked.

She sank again into the chair beneath the screeching gas-jet. "Grit," she repeated dully, "was a stone wall." And between very honest, tired, and lonely tears she began slowly

to spell out the words of the coverless book, having gained within the past few hours some understanding of what it means in the battle of life to draw the sword and throw away the scabbard.

There came another afternoon, another evening, another year, and still another; but this narrative covers merely a part of two days—Great Taylor's first and last as a junk-woman. The latter came nearly ten years after the burial of Grit. For almost a decade Nell followed in his grimy footprints and the polyglot people of the lower East Side, looking down from their windows as she passed through the congested streets pushing steadily with head bent, thought of her either as an infinitesimal molecule at the bottom of the mass where the light of idealism seldom penetrates or else as a female Colossus striding from end to end of the Devil's Own city only ankle-deep in the débris from which she wrested an existence. But to Great Taylor it seemed not to matter what people thought. She sang her song through the cavernous streets, the only song she knew: "Rags, old iron, bottles, and ra-ags." She pounded with a huge, determined fist on alley gates, she learned expertly to thread the traffic and to laugh at the teamsters, their oaths, their curses. "They ain't so bad." And, finally, bickering and bargaining with men of all classes, she came to wonder why people called this the Devil's Own city. In all those years of toil she did not once see him in the eyes of men. But there came the day when she said, "I'm done."

On this day Great Taylor lifted the end of a huge kitchen range against two struggling members of the other sex. A pain shot through her breast, but she carried her part of the dead weight, saying nothing, and, at high noon, pushed her jingling, jangling cart through streets sharply outlined with sunlight and shadow to a dilapidated brick warehouse that, long since, had taken the place of Grit's junk-yard.

There, in the interior gloom of the shabby old building, could be seen piles of broken, twisted, and rusty things—twisted iron rods, broken cam-shafts, cog wheels with missing teeth, springs that had lost their elasticity—a miniature mountain of scrap iron each piece of which at some time had been a part of some smoothly working machine. In another pile were discarded household utensils—old pots and pans

and burnt-out kettles, old stoves through the linings of which the flames had eaten and the rust had gnawed. There were other hillocks and mountains with shadowy valleys between—a mountain of waste paper, partly baled, partly stuffed into bursting bags of burlap, partly loose and scattered over the grimy floor; a hill of rags, all colours fading into sombre shadows. . . . And in the midst of these mountains and valleys of junk sat Great Taylor upon her dilapidated throne.

She drooped there over an old coverless book, spelling out the words and trying to forget the pain that was no longer confined to her breast. From shoulder to hip molten slag pulsed slowly through her veins and great drops of sweat moved from her temples and made white-bottomed rivulets among the smudges of her cheeks. "I'm done," she mumbled, closing Grit's book. "I got a right to quit. I got a right to be idle like other people. . . ."

Raising her head she appraised the piles that surrounded her. "All this stuff!" It had to be disposed of. She lifted herself from the creaking chair and, finding a pot of black paint and a board, laboured over this latter for a time. "I could get rid of it in a week," she mused. But she was done—done for good. "I ain't going to lay a hand on the cart again!" She studied the sign she had painted, and spelled out the crooked letters: "M A n W A n T e D." It would take a man a month, maybe more, she reckoned, adding: "Grit could done it in no time." She moved to the arched door of the warehouse and hung the sign outside in the sunlight against an iron shutter and for a moment stood there blinking. Despite the sunlight and warmth she was trembling, the familiar noises were a babel to her ears; the peddlers with their carts piled high with fruits and vegetables and colourful merchandise seemed like strangers; the glossy-haired women with baskets seemed to be passing backward out of her life, and the street was suddenly an alien land. "What's the matter with me?" she asked herself.

Returning to the interior gloom of the warehouse, she looked down upon the old junk-cart. The string of bells was the only part of it that had not been renewed twice, thrice, a number of times since Grit had left it standing on the vacant lot. "Guess I'll save the bells," she decided.



The rest she would destroy. Nobody else was going to use it—nobody. She cast about for an adequate instrument of destruction, an axe or sledge, and remembering a piece of furnace grate upon the farther pile of junk, made her way slowly into the deepening shadows.

There, at the foot of the rusty mountain of scrap iron, Great Taylor stood irresolute, straining her eyes to pierce the gloom. She had not seen any one enter; and yet, standing beyond the pile with white hands stabbing the bottom of his pockets, was a man. She could not remember having seen him before, and yet he was vaguely familiar. One eye looked at her steadily from beneath a drooping lid, the other blinked like the shutter of a camera and seemed to take intimate photographs of all parts of her grimy person. His sleek hair was curled over his temples with ends pointing up, and she caught, or imagined, the fragrance of pomade.

"What do you want?" she breathed, allowing the heavy piece of iron to sink slowly to her side.

"Sit down," said the man. "Let's talk things over."

Great Taylor sank into a broken armchair, her huge calloused hands rested in her lap, wrists crossed, palms turned upward, fingers stiffly curled. "I know who you are," she mumbled, leaning forward and peering through the half-light. "What do you want?"

"You hung out a sign. . . ."

"You ain't the man I expected."

"No?" He rocked up on his toes and made a gesture that indicated the piles of junk. "You're done."

"I'm done," assented Great Taylor. "I ain't going to lay a hand on the cart again. Ten years. . . ."

"Uhm. You have a right to the things that other women have. But . . ." He glanced around the dingy warehouse. "Is this all you have for your ten years?"

Great Taylor made no reply.

"It isn't much," said the man.

"It's something," said Great Taylor.

"Not enough to live on."

"Not enough to live on," she echoed. "But I can't go on working. I can't go on alone. The cart's too heavy to push alone. I'm done." She drooped there.

"I think we can arrange something." For a moment the

man was silent, his queer eyes moving over her body. "I had something in mind when I entered—something aside from junk. I could make a place for you. I'll do better than that. With this rubbish you buy a half share in one of my places and sit all day with your hands folded. You can make more in a week than you ever made in a year. . . ." His voice flowed smoothly on until Great Taylor raised her head.

"I didn't come ten years ago."

The man laughed. "Who cares how you make your money? Do you know what people say when they hear you calling through the streets? They say, 'It's nothing, it's only Great Taylor.' And do you know what they think when they look down upon you and your junk-cart? They think of you just as you used to think of Grit. . . ."

She staggered to her feet. "You leave Grit out of it!" For ten years a sentence had been pulsing through her mind. "Get out!" she cried, "*Grit warn't dirty underneath!*" The pain in her breast choked her and stopped her short as she moved threateningly toward him. The piece of iron fell heavily to the floor.

"Who sees underneath?" came the voice of the man.

"Grit," she moaned, "Grit sees underneath." And she hurled her tortured body forward, striking at him with her fists. She fell upon the pile of scrap iron. Each heave of her breast was a sob. She struggled to her feet and glared around her. But the man was not there.

Moaning, she sank into the armchair. "What's the matter with me? There warn't nobody here! *He* warn't here. No man could stay the same for ten years." The piles of junk seemed slowly to revolve around her. "What's the matter with me?" she asked again. "Ain't I got a right? . . ."

"Of course you have a right to the things you want." From the top of the hill of rags came his voice. It brought Great Taylor to her feet, sobbing. But the pain in her side, more fearful than ever, held her motionless.

"Wash away the ugly grime of toil," said the voice. "You're less than forty. You're a woman. You can have the things that other women have."

"I got more than some women," she cried. "I'm clean—

"I'm clean underneath." She stumbled toward him but again sank to the floor. She tried to spring up. Her will sprang up, for her spirit at last was splendid even if her body was weak. It dragged her up from the floor. And now she could see him all around her—on top the hill of rags, on top the mountain of iron, amid the bursting bags of waste paper—blinking down as he sat enthroned upon the débris—the twisted, broken, discarded things of the city that people call the Devil's Own. "These are mine!" he called. "And you belong to the débris. You are one of the broken, useless things." From all points he moved toward her. She could no longer fight him off. There was no escape. "Grit," she cried, "Grit, you can stop him. You . . . you was a stone wall. . . ."

Stumbling back, her hand struck a familiar object. There was a tinkle of bells. She wheeled around, and there in the shadows of the dilapidated old warehouse someone was drooping over the handle of the junk-cart—a collarless man with baggy breeches and a nose that leaned toward the smudges and hollows of his cheek. He was striving to move the cart. "Not alone," cried Great Taylor. "You can't do it alone! But we can do it together!" She took hold of the handle. The thing moved. "Easy as a baby carriage," she laughed. "We should always done it together. . . ."

Out of the gloom, through the arched doorway into the sunlight moved the cart with its jingling, jangling bells. Glossy-haired women with their baskets made way for it and the cart bumped down over the curb. Teamsters drew aside their heavy-hoofed horses. Peddlers rolled their push-carts back to the curb.

"The street opens when we work together," laughed Great Taylor.

"Who is she talking to?" asked the people.

"Talking to herself," the ignorant replied.

"And why is she looking up like that?"

"Looking for junk."

"And why does she laugh?" they asked.

"Who knows? Who knows? Perhaps she's happy."

A song burst from her throat: "Rags," she sang, "old iron . . . bottles, and ra-ags. . . ."

People inside their houses heard her song and the bells of

her cart. "It's nothing," they laughed, "it's only Great Taylor." A woman came to a window and waved an object that glinted in the sunlight. "How much?" she called down. But Great Taylor seemed not to hear. A child ran out with a bundle in her arms. "Rags," called the child, then stepped back out of the way, wondering. Great Taylor was passing on. An elevated train sent down a cataract of noise, but her song rose above it: "Rags . . . old iron. . . ." And when she reached the avenue a policeman with a yellow emblematic wheel embroidered on his sleeve held up his hand and stopped the traffic of the Devil's Own city to let Great Taylor pass.

And so, like a female Colossus, she strode slowly across the city, her head tilted, her eyes looking up from the cavernous streets—up beyond the lofty roofs of houses, her voice becoming fainter and fainter: "Rags . . . old iron . . . bottles and ra-ags . . ." until the God of those who fall fighting in the battle of life reached down and, drawing the sword, threw away the scabbard.

THE END







